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# CHESTERTON & THE JEWS





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by Sean P. Dailey

Welcome to this special issue of *Gilbert Magazine*. After years of reflection, we have decided to deal in a thorough and forthright manner with the oft-repeated accusation against G.K. Chesterton, that he was an anti-Semite. It is a charge that continues to resurface, despite all evidence to the contrary. Chesterton dealt with it in his own lifetime (see his essay, “A Report on My Anti-Semitism” on page 8) and it has continued to resurface in the decades since his death. But as *GM* publisher Dale Ahlquist writes in his lengthy essay beginning on page 20, it is “a mean and wretched lie.” The charge alone, he points out, “is poisonous.”

Just how poisonous and false this charge really is you will see for yourself in the pages that follow. We scrutinize it from all angles, beginning with a personal statement from Dale on page 6. Dale then examines Chesterton’s boyhood friendships (page 18) and the infamous Marconi scandal (page 27). He also interviews Robert Asch, a Jew who converted to Catholicism thanks to Chesterton, on page 13. Fr. James Schall weighs in on page 11. And throughout this issue, in essays from our contributing editors, in book reviews, movie reviews, essays on Jews and Distributism, and of course with Chesterton’s own original writing on the subject, we take the “mean and wretched lie” that Chesterton was an anti-Semite, and tear the entrails out of it. Chesterton fans can now confront this lie head on, and not be embarrassed when this false accusation arises. Chesterton in his lifetime was as loved by Jews as he was loved by everyone else who knew him.

This issue’s cover shows Chesterton with Israel Zangwill as they leave a hearing at the Select Committee on Censorship in 1910. Both Chesterton and Zangwill testified against government censorship of plays. Zangwill (1864–1926) was probably the most famous Jewish literary figure of the early twentieth century, and he and Chesterton had respect and admiration for one another. Chesterton called Zangwill “a great artist and a very earnest thinker,” and “a mystic and visionary Jew”; his plays include “The Children of the Ghetto” and “The Melting Pot.” Like Chesterton, he was a Zionist, and like Chesterton, he was great with a one-liner: “A man likes his wife to be just clever enough to appreciate his cleverness, and just stupid enough to admire it.” Zangwill reviewed Chesterton’s play “Magic” and said that although Chesterton was trying to “put the clock back in philosophy” he was putting “the clock forward in drama.”

Speaking of *Orthodoxy*, for all of 2008 Peter Floriani (as Dr. Thursday) has been posting, every Thursday, a chapter-by-chapter examination of that book on the American Chesterton Society blog. His “Index to the Thursdays of *Orthodoxy*” can be found at <http://americanchestertonsociety.blogspot.com/2008/09/index-to-thursdays-of-orthodoxy.html>. The index has all his essays

100  
years ago

Literary London was still buzzing from the publication of *Orthodoxy*. The book had been reviewed in nearly every magazine and newspaper, and *The New Age* asked Chesterton to respond to one of the more extended criticisms of the book written by E. Belfort Bax, which called *Orthodoxy* “a spiritual spoof.” Chesterton replied that Mr. Bax’s criticism demonstrated not that Christianity was dead but that the nineteenth century attack on Christianity was utterly dead.

on every chapter except the last two, which have yet to appear. This is a real treasure—there are twelve essays on “The Ethics of Elfland” alone!—and will be of use to scholars, researchers, and anyone with an interest in Chesterton.

Science fiction writer Jerry Pournelle has a blog, and on that blog he has an essay, “Distributism vs. Redistributism.” Though both Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc would guffaw at being described as “conservative capitalists,” Pournelle’s article contains many fine observations, including this:

The Regulatory State seems determined to restrict America to two kinds of companies: those with fewer than 50 employees and giant corporations with thousands of employees. No one in his right mind would expand a company...from 49 to 51 employees. The instant one gets to 50 (or 51 depending on the state) a huge panoply of regulations kick in, so many that even if one can afford to comply with them all, one will also need a compliance staff of several employees to make sure one is in compliance. This means that up to 10 percent of one’s workforce does nothing productive except keep the owners out of jail.

It doesn’t make much sense, but that’s Hodge and Gudge for you, who work together much more closely than either the Left or the Right will ever admit. Find Pournelle’s essay at <http://jerrypournelle.com/view/2008/Q4/view541.html#Distributism>.

The revolution continues: there is a G.K. Chesterton Theatre Company, headquartered in Santa Monica, California. The company’s mission, as reported on the Chesterton and Friends blog, “is to engage the Hollywood Culture and put on great biographical works that will move and inspire the audience.” The company’s first production, *Malcolm and Teresa*, about the conversion of Malcolm Muggeridge, ran through November 16. Visit them on the Web at [www.gkchestertontheatre.org](http://www.gkchestertontheatre.org). For information on future productions call (310) 462-5141 or e-mail [gkctheatre@yahoo.com](mailto:gkctheatre@yahoo.com).

Parting Trifle: Season IV of the *Apostle of Common Sense* is now available on DVD. Go to <http://chesterton.org/acs/merchandise.htm> to order your copy in time for Christmas.

## LUNACY & LETTERS

from Gilbert Magazine Readers



Dear Sean,

I'm surprised that so many winning entries in the 2008 cleriheiw contest break an essential cleriheiw rule (*GM* September, 2008, page 17). If we trust the American Chesterton Society's definition of the cleriheiw, then these poems are supposed to rhyme. A "rhyme," the dictionary tells us, is a repetition of sounds in two or more words beginning with the vowel in the last stressed syllable of each word. "Stew and blue." "Creation and automation." See? It's not rocket surgery.

Examples of this year's non-rhymes? "Her and nicer." "Omar and nor bar." "Good twist" and "Ahlquist." "Law and law (these are not "two or more words"). "Debussy and the sea." "Ripley and pimply."

I am not against outlandish rhymes. These are part of the fun, as when Chesterton rhymed "Italy" and "Bitterly" (but of course you have read it with an English accent).

In my not-so-humble opinion, a contest judge should never fudge when awarding prizes of whatever sizes.

Arthur Quigley  
Decatur, Illinois

Dear Sean,

In vain I have searched your September issue for a key to the photographs featured on the cover. Who are these folks? Some answers can be found in the captioned photos that accompany the conference report (pages 12–16). Anyway, I doubt that I'm alone in wishing to put names to these interesting faces.

Lana Furman  
Boise, Idaho

Dear Sean,

The September/October issue of *Gilbert Magazine* arrived this morning. I put aside 3,276.3 Chestertonian tasks (every three years since 1832 I have clearly announced my retirement, but nobody takes any notice!) to read it, and I had intended to write my very real appreciation of the radiant front cover—which made me self-pitying because you all contrived to survive

without my presence—and of several fine articles inside, but I was then stopped in my tracks.

I came to page 40, "In Defense of Intolerance, by Maria MacDonald." Multiply her seventeen years by five, and she is still a year younger than am I. (I think I'm right, but I've run out of fingers and toes.) You will understand, I am confident, how very warming it is to people like me at the end of our usefulness and not very far from the end of this life, to watch young people of this calibre taking over.

The intellectual comprehension and courage in that essay impressed me very, very strongly, as did her fine use of language. I constantly say that if dark powers wish to destroy rational thought and morality, they begin by corrupting language, and we are unremittingly subjected to such attacks daily. So lucid writing is important.

If you are able and willing to pass on my admiration to Maria McDonald, I would be grateful.

Aidan Mackey  
Bedford, England

Dear Sean,

Your recent editorial, "House of Cards" makes the case for Distributism, which you define as a society based on families living in small autonomous communities (*GM* September, 2008, page 7).

While I agree that we have sadly become a nation that runs on borrowed money, and that this must stop if we are to survive, is this credit-based economy a result of big government? I should think it possible to have a debt-ridden small community and a debt-free large nation state.

Furthermore, you will have to demonstrate for us that a society of independent villages could defend itself

from an invasion by a large military power. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 comes to mind. The entire United States was mobilized for the war effort, and this effort was controlled and operated by the central government.

I would also ask how such complex products such as automobiles, microwave ovens, televisions, and computers would be manufactured in your Distributist utopia. Must Distributists do without these?

How many Americans or Canadians might be persuaded to leave their urban lifestyle, with all of its amenities and all of its problems, in order to move to a village as a small-acreage farmer, or to become a store-owning merchant, or itinerant builder or repairman?

Each of your arguments for Distributism makes a certain amount of sense taken by itself, but taken together the arguments all add up to an impossible dream.

Lyle Patterson  
Miami, Florida

Dear Sean,

I enjoyed Mike Foster's review of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the September issue of *Gilbert Magazine* (page 44). I am a huge fan of J.R.R. Tolkien's original fiction but have not read much of his translations of ancient poems. Chesterton fan though I am, I appreciate the frequent appearance of Tolkien in your pages, usually courtesy of Mr. Foster.

I disagree, however, with Mr. Foster's characterization of Frodo's actions at the end of his quest as a "failure." It is a failure only in the most material sense. By the time he stood on the threshold of the Cracks of Doom, Frodo was entirely spent: physically, emotionally, psychologically, and even spiritually, he had nothing left to give. And yet the Ring was still destroyed. Because of Frodo's humility and his charity toward Gollum, Grace was allowed to play its part, as Tolkien himself explains in his *Letters*.

Francis Barreiro  
Winslow, Arizona



# Chesterton and Anti-Semitism: A Personal Reflection

by Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society

There are two kinds of people who accuse G.K. Chesterton of being anti-Semitic: those who don't know any better, and those who do. In either case the charge is poisonous. It has done enormous damage to Chesterton's reputation, prevented people from discovering and enjoying his writings, and generally added to the confusion in the world.

The American Chesterton Society and *Gilbert Magazine* have been fairly successful in avoiding this topic until now. It was a pretty good strategy: "Silence is the one unbearable repartee," says Chesterton, and "Neglect is the Nemesis of nonsense." But Chesterton, of course, is a controversialist. He takes on puritans and pagans, conservatives and liberals, atheists and agnostics, Protestants, feminists, capitalists, socialists, Eugenicists, Darwinists and determinists, utopians and philanthropists. If we are going to embrace Chesterton, we must not be afraid of controversy. But when the subject is the Jews, for some reason the discussion becomes more difficult and goes off track more easily. Any generalization might spark the accusation that stops all discussion, the catch-all catchword: anti-Semitic.

It occurred to me a few years ago that this toxic charge against Chesterton had to be dealt with systematically and exhaustively in order to address both the ignorant and the malevolent. After I began to dig into the texts, I soon realized there was enough material for a book. Unfortunately, the book still needs to be written. In the meantime, we are devoting this special double issue to covering all the main points and, as always, letting Chesterton speak for himself.

But I would like to take this opportunity to speak on his behalf. I have devoted a large part of my life to studying Chesterton's writings, and not only studying them but promoting them, believing as I do that he is a literary giant who deserves much greater praise than he has been given. My task has been a pleasant one, getting people to discover Chesterton and watching them be astonished. I have met other enthusiasts from all around the world who share my passion for Chesterton. I can say without exception that I have never met a Chestertonian who had any animosity or hostility toward the Jews. If Chesterton is anti-Semitic, he has very unfaithful disciples. Uninterested, even. It seems that the only people who are obsessed with Chesterton's views on the Jews are those who haven't bothered to read him.

I can also say this: I have been welcomed in a wide variety of settings to give talks on Chesterton, from small

schools to major colleges and universities, from private homes to the House of Lords in England. I have been interviewed and consulted by the academy and the media. I am happy to say that not once, not even when defending Chesterton in debates, have I ever had anyone ever accuse me of anti-Semitism.

While I cannot say that some of my best friends are Jewish (since I don't have any friends) I can say that some of my best relatives are Jewish. For most of my life I have had the privilege of being intimately involved with Jewish people, both secular and religious. I have feasted with them and fasted with them. I have argued with them and prayed with them. If someone said that I hated the Jews, it would be laughable. It would also be slander. And yet, I can certainly imagine that because of my association with Chesterton, there are people who probably suspect that I am anti-Semitic. When I say I can imagine it, I mean that I really cannot imagine it.

I don't know if the sensation is anything close to what Chesterton felt when he was so accused. From his writings, I detect that he seemed as puzzled and frustrated as he was amused by the epithet. Chesterton said that if he hated the Jews, he would say so. But he insisted that he did not hate the Jews. Yet the charge was repeated. He was famous for having no enemies, for never attacking anyone personally but for attacking only ideas. But in spite of his charity and kindness, he was still accused of disliking the Jews. There were Jews who assumed that he was anti-Semitic until they got to know him, and who repented of their earlier resentment and who rose to defend him against the charge. To no avail. It was repeated again. It is still repeated.

The effect of the charge is simple: the quick and facile dismissal of Chesterton without ever engaging him or his ideas. The debate is over before it begins. And no defense and no defender seems capable of removing the label once it has been stuck.

The term is lofted conveniently or carelessly at Chesterton, and with no consistent meaning. It is a term that has come to mean whatever its accusers want it to mean, which always gives them an advantage.

And so, let us begin by establishing this simple definition: anti-Semitism means hostility toward the Jews.

And let us answer the charge with the same, simple clarity: G. K. Chesterton was not an anti-Semite.

*I have devoted a large part of my life to studying Chesterton's writings, and not only studying them but promoting them, believing as I do that he is a literary giant who deserves much greater praise than he has been given.*

Chesterton's ideas about the Jews were consistent from beginning to end. We may not agree with his perspective on Zionism, we may not like his mentioning the history of usury among the Jews, we may not like his use of the term, "The Jewish Problem," but we cannot ignore the fact that whatever his precepts, he was right in his predictions. He warned that if Europe continued to ignore or deny that there was a "Jewish Problem," there would be a horrible outbreak of violence against the Jews. Again, we may not feel comfortable about his observations of Jewish behavior, we may not appreciate his assessment of Jewish weaknesses, we may not think his jokes about Jews are funny, but it is calumny to describe his attitude as hate. It is dishonest even to call his words hostile.

What is the point of attacking Chesterton? It does not serve to defend the Jews; it only serves to attack Chesterton. For Chesterton does not attack the Jews. Never at any time does he show malice towards the Jews, never does he insult them for being Jews. He said he did not dislike Jews. He said he wanted what was best for them, and he said he would die defending them. All the personal testimonies of him bear out his charity and personal good will.

What does it mean that he denied the charge of being anti-Semitic? It means that either he was lying or he was deluded or he was telling the truth. If he was lying, where is the evidence? A few fragments of poetry lifted out of context? If he was deluded, how does one explain his astonishingly lucid thinking about virtually everything else? If he was not lying or deluded, then he was telling the truth, and it is long past time to stop defaming him with the poisonous title of anti-Semite.

Because he was such a prolific writer, because his influence is still being felt, because he wrote about big things in a big way, he is subject to greater scrutiny than the rest

of us. But he deserves the scrutiny, and I maintain that he bears up under it. I can speak with some authority on the matter because I have read more of his writings and dug more deeply into them than just about anybody else. I know the charges against him are false. And I will die defending Chesterton. ☸

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In her retelling of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," author Regina Doman (*Angel in the Waters*) mixes Chestertonian delight with modern situations in a combination that has been a hit with Catholic readers again and again. This is her fourth installment of the Fairy Tale Novel series that began with *The Shadow of the Bear* and continued in *Black as Night* and *Waking Rose*.

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# A Report on My Anti-Semitism

by G.K. Chesterton

will take the opportunity here of correcting a curious mistake that clings to the minds of numbers of my correspondents. There is in particular a gloomy gentleman in America who keeps on asking me how my Anti-Semite prejudice is getting on, and generally displaying a curiosity about how many Hebrew teeth I have pulled out this week, and how often a Pogrom is held in front of my house. He appears to base it all on some statement of mine that Jews were tyrants and traitors. Upon this basis his indignation is eloquent, lengthy, and (in my opinion) just. The only weakness affecting this superstructure is the curious detail that I never did say that Jews were tyrants and traitors. I said that a particular kind of Jew tended to be a tyrant and another particular kind of Jew tended to be a traitor. I say it again. Patent facts of this kind are permitted in the criticism of every other nation on

the planet: it is not counted illiberal to say that a certain kind of Frenchman tends to be sensual or a certain kind of Prussian tends to be supercilious. It is as plain as a pikestaff that the Parisian tradition of life and letters has a marked element of sensuality; it is as plain as a pikestaff that the Prussian theory of the aristocracy and the army has an element of rather crude conceit. It is also as plain as a pikestaff

that those who are creditors will always have a temptation to be tyrants, and that those who are cosmopolitans will always have a temptation to be spies. This has nothing to do with alleging that the majority of any people fall into its typical temptations. In this respect I should imagine that Jews varied in their moral proportions as much as the rest of mankind. Rehoboam was

*The crank is never really interested in his subject, because he takes too stiff and biased a view of it. He knows nothing of the romantic hesitations, the rich reactions that there are in a really interesting subject. He cannot love and hate a thing at the same time; which is the root of half the poetry of the world.*

a tyrant; Jehosaphat was not. In what is perhaps the most celebrated collection of Jews in human history, the proportion of traitors was one in twelve. But I cannot see why the tyrants should not be called tyrants and the traitors traitors; why Rehoboam should not cause a rebellion or Judas become an object of dislike, merely because they happen to be members of a race persecuted for other reasons and on other occasions. Those are my views on Jews. They are more reasonable than those of the people that wreck their shops; and much more reasonable than those of the people who justify them on all occasions.

The crank is never really interested in his subject, because he takes too stiff and biased a view of it. He knows nothing of the romantic hesitations, the rich reactions that there are in a really interesting subject. He cannot love and hate a thing at the same time; which is the root of half

the poetry of the world. For instance, I should firmly claim that I am interested in Jews. I have not, indeed, the faintest serious dislike of them; nor can I be said to be on their side. But they attract me, they puzzle me; I find myself forever fitting theories to them; I think they are a human triumph, a national danger, an intellectual inspiration, and a frightful nuisance. But the people who publish little pamphlets about the persecution of Jews in Russia are not interested in Jews at all. They are interested in certain imaginary good old men with patriarchal beards and ragged gabardines who are made to wander about in the snow because they never did anyone any harm. All the interesting part of the Jewish problem, good as well as bad, is simply left out.

My friends and I originally shocked the Victorian conventions by saying that the Jews should be recognised as a separate nation, with their own national virtues and vices. Our critics howled with horror at the very suggestion that Benjamin Disraeli was not as English as the English primrose. A long controversy ensued, in the course of which they were gradually induced to listen to reason. But our critic invariably ended up by saying, with undiminished self-satisfaction, "The truth is, Jews may be different from us; but, after all, they have their good points and their bad points, just like Frenchmen and all sorts of foreigners. We must be broad-minded; they aren't all horrible heartless devils, as you say they are."

Needless to say, I never said anything of the sort. I never said anything except the very thing he is himself saying. But when I first said it, he maintained that what I said was nonsense; and, now that he has found out for himself that it is sense, he chooses to say that I must have said something else. He makes a caricature of my caricature of the Jew, without even looking at it to see whether it was a fair portrait; and later, when he sees the same portrait, he points it out to me as a model without even remembering that it is mine.

There appeared lately in the *News-Chronicle* an only too merciful review of an only too vulnerable volume of

sensational stories which I lately cast upon the world [*Four Faultless Felons*]. I hope I cannot be accused of taking such books of mine very seriously, and I hope I am not unduly puffed up when they happen to be criticised indulgently. But there is one thing which I do take seriously, and that is the one thing which was criticised critically. I do take my real opinions seriously, though not the stories that sometimes embody them. And I take especially seriously one particular opinion which has been universally misunderstood. I refer to my real views on the Jewish Problem and the Jews, and the critic in the *News-Chronicle* said the only thing to which I have any right to take exception when he deduced from one passage that I am “a professed Anti-Semite.”

This is not true, and certainly the passage he quotes does not prove it to be true. He quotes a passage in which a financier declares that the Jewish vice is greed, or love of luxury or vanity; and concludes by saying that he knows this because he is a Jew himself. The critic declares that no Jew could ever talk like that. This is rather surprising, for I have, in fact, heard several Jews talk exactly like that. It seems to me that it is my critic who is the Anti-Semite, since he is apparently unaware of one of the very real virtues of the Jew—his capacity for detachment and objective criticism. Jews sometimes pursue (unwisely, as I think) an external policy of silence and suppression in the Press and the political world. They defend it in private on the ground of real peril from real persecution. But it is very rare to find a Jew who shows in private that shamefaced, muddle-headed half-hypocrisy and blustering evasion only too common in British and other Western patriots. The Jew may sometimes try to conceal the facts from the world, but he does not try to conceal them from himself, or even from his friends. I have any number of Jewish friends quite capable of saying that the Jewish temptation is greed and luxury. But, in any case, the critic misses the whole point by omitting the preceding sentence. The point was that the financier began by saying, “Avarice is not a Jewish vice.”

In short, my Jew was not attacking Jews, though many Jews really do.

He was defending Jews from the much more common but completely mistaken charge of being stingy and mean. In my story, somebody had suggested that a certain Jewish pawnbroker was a miser. The financier answers that a Jew is never a miser. His temptation is not to hoard money, but to grab it and spend it, if only in vulgarity or vice. To point out that Jews are not mean and miserly, even if they are showy and purse-proud, is to say something that might quite naturally be said by a Jew, and certainly not something that could only be said by an Anti-Semite.

For the rest, I maintain that it is perfectly sound psychology to make a man repel a charge against his race as untrue by admitting that another and almost contrary charge is true. It is what almost all patriots do who combine patriotism with any kind of balance and liberality of mind. I do not know who wrote the review in the *News-Chronicle*, but my thoughts naturally strayed to the literary editor of that paper, the distinguished essayist Mr. Robert Lynd, and from thence to the problems of his own native land. Suppose that I, as an Englishman, were trying to explain things to Mr. Lynd as an Irishman. I might very well say, for instance, that the English are not really cruel, though they have given the Irish a very justifiable impression of their cruelty. But they have been, in effect, cruel through credulity, through laziness and ignorance. I might almost say they have been cruel through good nature. It was not so much that they had too low an opinion of the Irish as that they had too high an opinion of the Anglo-Irish, of the officials and the landlords and the parliamentary secretaries and the police; of the Anglo-Irish garrison that was to them like the Anglo-Indian garrison. But to suppose that a silly spinster reading truculent articles actually and directly desires to massacre Hindus, like a fanatical Moslem, is to do her an injustice—or perhaps pay her too high a compliment. It is almost equally untrue that most of us were ever in a mood to enjoy the massacre of Catholics and Celts. But it was none the less true that we tolerated the massacre of Catholics and Celts. And we did so through sins and weaknesses that were really our own, and

about these I should express myself as vehemently, and even violently, as any Irishman. I should make a particular point of being emphatic and even exaggerative in describing the snobbishness, the impotence, the intellectual inertia of my countrymen who consented to the enslavement of a Christian nation; to show that I was defending them from a particular false criticism, and not denying that any criticism could be true. I might even talk rather bitterly about slavery and political poltroonery, as the Jew in my little story talks bitterly about vice and greed. But the Jew in my story does not talk more bitterly about them than several Jews in history have talked about them.

I prefer to make a note of this mild protest against a very satisfactory critique of a not very satisfactory book. For it concerns a really serious problem, and misrepresents me in a matter in which I do not wish to be misrepresented, though I generally am misrepresented. If I were an enemy of the Jews, I should call myself an enemy of the Jews.

There is one thing that nobody seems to notice about Anti-Semitism; and that is that the very name is a surrender to Semites. Anti-Semitism, so far from being a cry of fanaticism, is a feeble and frightened euphemism. One of the ninety-nine reasons for not calling oneself an Anti-Semite is that it is so wretchedly polite and apologetic a thing to be. A man implies that he dislikes the Semitic race, he dares not admit that he dislikes the Jewish people. That there are such things as Jews is a fact of immediate integration and experience, of which we are all certain. That there are such things as Semites is a theory of indirect and partial scientific syntheses, of which we are not certain at all. There are people who dislike Jews; though I am not one of them. But I doubt if there are any people who dislike Semites. I doubt whether any human being looks first at an Arab to see whether he is a Semite; whether he has certain craniological or other marks, supposed to connect him with the same large human division as the Jews. No Anti-Semite expects the vices of a Semite. No Zionist glories in the triumphs of a Moslem Arab who is supposed to be a Semite. Nobody goes



poking about in Egypt or the Levant to find any qualities that are Jewish among any people that are not Jews. All men know in their hearts that Jews are Jews, and there is nothing like them in the world. Israel, like the Lord her God, is one; and there is not other tribe to share with her either the admiration or the power or the persecution that attend her on her wandering way.

The truth is that the very name of Anti-Semitism dates from the same

artificial age as the contention of Anti-Anti-Semitism. The very title records the time when people were afraid to touch the Jewish problem. While the majority talked as if there were no problem even the minority tried to talk as if it were not a Jewish problem. They tried, unconsciously perhaps, to imply that it was merely an anthropological problem, to be discussed

by professors: like the problem of why the Patagonian is tall, or why the Hairy Ainu is hairy. In other words, the very term Anti-Semite bears all the marks of the "liberal" age which denounces it. It is, in the bad sense, a very Victorian expression; a phrase that strikes the note of the middle of the nineteenth century. And is so chiefly in this: that it takes refuge in science to escape from truth.

It is needless here to recapitulate all the shifts to which that sham science lent itself. Just as it confused the Jewish problem by generalizations about Semites, so it confused the Irish problem by generalizations about Celts. But muddled as it was, it had in it a certain magnetic power strangely akin to magic. And the worst of it is that the learned are more liable to this extraordinary delusion than the ignorant. If anyone were to ask me why I trust a peasant or any such plain man more than most intellectual aristocracies, I should be content to answer with this case alone. The man I mean, and the man I trust, is the man who knows quite well that a Jew is a Jew; whether or no he was ever a Semite; and that

Irishman is an Irishman, whether or no he was ever a Celt.

All this obsession with the origins resolves itself into the habit of leaving out the story. If you ask the common conscience of men, "What has made Smith a rascal?" nine times out of ten it will answer "Smith has made Smith a rascal." After that, it will in due proportion make all decent alliance for heredity and environment, for race or for climate. But no sane man, who does


*No sane man, who does not know Smith, will dream of deducing where he is or is not a rascal from the facts of race or climate; from the skull of his great-grandfather or the weather-chart of his parish.*

not know Smith, will dream of deducing where he is or is not a rascal from the facts of race or climate; from the skull of his great-grandfather or the weather-chart of his parish. That is, the same man will recognize that the most important thing about Smith is what he has done with himself; that the next most important thing is what other people have done to him. He

will want to know what has happened; and not merely what conditions existed before anything happened. In short, he will want history; and all this talk of primitive conditions of climate or anthropology is a dodge for leaving out history. And this is the first fact to note if anyone asks, "What has made the Jew secretive or tenacious or restless or inspiring, or whatever we may think him to be?" The first answer is that the Jew has made the Jew secretive or tenacious or whatever he may be. The next most important fact is what the Gentiles have done to the Jews. This had nothing to do whether where we do in fact blame the Jew or the enemies of the Jew. It only means that what he is mainly the result of what he does and what other people do; not merely the result of the physical type of the remote tribe from which he sprang. It may be creditable to him, for instance that through the Christian ages he remained in isolation. But his problem is due to the fact the he did remain in isolation; not to the fact that people with Semitic skulls are bound to remain in isolation. He cannot be explained by

the theory of race; and he is himself sufficient to expose and explode the theory of climate. For he has continued to be himself, for centuries, in all the climates of the world.

Even those who accuse me of being Anti-Semitic will hardly accuse me of being particularly Anti-Celtic. And the same point about the importance of the historic will, as compared with the prehistoric and conjectural conditions, applies to the other very different case which I have coupled for convenience with this one. The Irish may have come from the Celts; but it was not in the least necessary for the Celts to turn into the Irish. That was done partly by their own conduct and partly by other people's conduct; but at any rate by conduct and not merely by conditions. Ireland made Ireland; with some unintentional assistance from England. It was the Irish and not the Celts who chose to remain Catholic; and being Catholic is a choice, while being Celtic is not. I have taken these two working examples merely as being both familiar and dissimilar. But this is one more odd thing to note about the comparison; a thing I have never understood. If you tell an Irishman that he is an Irishman and not an Englishman, he will say he has insisted he is not an Englishman; possibly he thanked God he is not an Englishman. But if you tell a Jew he is not an Englishman, he says you're an Anti-Semite.

I am not going to persecute any Jews. But I am going to go on talking about them. I shall talk about them as freely as I should about Germany or Japan; saying what, in my opinion, are their dangers, defects, or neglected merits. I shall say that a group of financial Jews urged on the African war, because they did; I heard them doing it. But I shall also say that I heard many of the equally unmistakable artistic and Bohemian Jews denounce the war fiercely. One is not supposed to insult America by discussing Trusts or France by discussing dueling; why should the Jews be the only people who refuse to be talked about intelligently? 

Composite essay from *Illustrated London News*, September 16, 1911; July 19, 1913; May 26, 1923; September 20, 1930; *New Witness*, September 23, 1921; *Daily News*, June 14, 1911



## On “Believing in Jews”

by James V. Schall, S.J.

In the *Illustrated London News* for September 20, 1930, G.K. Chesterton reacted to a review of one of his books that appeared in a journal called *News-Chronicle*.

Chesterton said that he takes opinions seriously, especially his own. Evidently the reviewer deduced from one passage in the book that Chesterton was himself a “professed Anti-Semite.” Of this view, Chesterton states bluntly: “This is not true, and certainly the passage he (the reviewer) quotes does not prove it to be true.”

The passage at issue concerns a Jewish financier in the story. This gentleman says that “the Jewish vice is greed, or love of luxury or vanity.” The character says that he knows this “because he is a Jew himself.” The reviewer states authoritatively that “No Jew could ever talk like that.” The implication is that Chesterton made this statement up because he was an “Anti-Semite” and did not know real Jews.

To this objection, Chesterton simply affirms that, in fact, he does know several Jews himself. They do talk like the man in the story to him about themselves. Indeed, Chesterton suspects that the reviewer is himself rather “Anti-Semitic” because he cannot imagine how Jews see themselves.

The real virtue of the Jew, however, is his capacity “for detached and objective criticism.” He may not say much about such and such a vice in public but he does not try to “conceal it from himself.” The Jew is fully capable of parodying himself and laughing at his vices, a good sign of objectivity.

It turns out, moreover, that the sentence of the financier preceding the one cited, left out by the critic, was precisely, “Avarice is not a Jewish

vice.” The Jewish financier, on the contrary, says it is. Chesterton goes on to explain, however, that Jews do not hoard money. They spend it “if only in vulgarity or vice.” Jewish philanthropy is famous. Jews are not “mean or misers.” Since Jews often, in their frankness, say these things of themselves, as Chesterton’s Jewish friends have said to him, it is not something that could only be said by an “Anti-Semite.”

Chesterton specifically attends to this comment because “I do not want to be misrepresented, though I generally am misrepresented. I am no more

of an Anti-Semite than any Zionist or detached and independent Jew who thinks that the solution of the Jewish Problem would be the separation of the races.” The point is not whether such a separation is good or bad as a solution. Rather it is whether the man proposing it is “Anti-Semitic” if he himself is a Jew. That would make the Jew “Anti-Semitic.” We must separate disagreements about policies from accusation of prejudice for taking a policy position that any reasonable man, including a Jew, might take on a complex issue. It may not be possible “to solve the Jewish Problem at all.” But that is simply a question of fact, whatever the honest means we propose to solve it.

But Chesterton had something more basic in mind. He wanted to answer the specific question of whether, as the critic implied, he was “a fanatical Anti-Semite.” Chesterton is very frank. In making his case, in these contrary-to-fact statements, notice that he uses the word Jew here, not Semite. “If I were an enemy of the Jews, I should call myself an enemy of the Jews; if I were anything that could

### OUR MR CHESTERTON



Digby D’Avigdor was one of the members of the Junior Debating Club at St. Paul’s. He was one of four Jews in the small group, all of whom remained lifelong friends with G.K. Chesterton.

When interviewed by Maisie Ward, he recalled, “I always have a vision of him wandering round the corridors with one of his disreputable books. His Greek primer all dog-eared, tattered, covered with drawings of goblins, all over the text as well as in the margins. The masters would say, ‘Chesterton, Chesterton, have you *no* care for books?’

“He meandered his way through school like a rudderless bark. He put up a smoke-screen over his real interests. I remember him called up to construe. Standing up he would sway backwards and forwards, his head bowed over a hopelessly ragged book. He would hold it in one hand and clutch it with the other to prevent it from disintegrating. He would construe adequately enough—but he would do the minimum. You wouldn’t think he had an ounce of poetry in him. And the master’s attention would be all on the book. ‘Good heavens, Chesterton, how can you read anything out of that book?’ Chesterton either wouldn’t or couldn’t concentrate.”

All of the masters assumed from Chesterton’s appearance and blank countenance that he had no love of poetry, but his close friends learned otherwise. D’Avigdor said fondly, “I think it was very clever of us to find him out.”

be called Anti-Jew, I should wish to be called an Anti-Jew." In other words, "Call me what I am and think I am." Chesterton knows exactly what an "Anti-Jew" is. He is not one.

The accusation of "Anti-Semite," however, is something else again. The word "Semite" and the word "Jew" are not equivalent or interchangeable without causing much confusion. Chesterton is adamant: "Under no circumstances whatsoever would I consent to be called an Anti-Semite." Why? The two words, Jew and Semite, have different origins and connotations. Real Jews exist, but no real Semite is walking down the street. "There is such a thing as a Jew; he might be hated as a Jew, though I do not hate him." Chesterton knows language. My dictionary defines a "Semite" in this way: "A member of any of a number of peoples of Ancient Southwestern Asia, including the Akkadians, Phoenicians, Hebrews, and Arabs." Obviously, to be an "Anti-Semite" is not exactly being exclusively Anti-Jew.

"The word (Semite) dates from the days when even fanatics had to disguise themselves as prigs," Chesterton tells us, "and I trust that, whatever be the merit of my views on the matter, I myself am neither one nor the other." That is, Chesterton is neither a prig nor a fanatic. The word "Semite" was a nineteenth-century "blunder, the habit of talking sham science in order to avoid talking real religion." The primary meaning of Jew is to be a follower of Abraham, a believer and observer of the Law and the Prophets.

Chesterton thinks that religion must be talked about, not pseudo-science. As a Christian, he holds the truth of the Hebrew Bible. In making the Jews a "race," we miss their real importance. "What determines the human part of human history is religion and not race, certainly not the pompous Victorian theories about race." Chesterton affirms, in a bemused sentence itself a parody on modern theories of religion, that he will continue to believe in "Jews, and nothing will persuade me that they are a medieval myth or a primitive folktale or an interpolation exposed by Higher Criticism."

The silliness of nineteenth-century science was to talk of the "existence

of Semites" as more certain than the existence of Jews, among whom Chesterton had many actual friends. He was certain at least that these friends existed. He talked to them. He had never actually met a "Semite" and, even less, an "Anti-Semite."

Meeting a "Semite" is like walking down a road and meeting a "man" but no single Socrates or Suzie. "I may suffer some of the scorn, then, poured on anybody who said he had seen a ghost," but, "I confess that I have actually seen a Jew." How delightful that is! Chesterton prefers meeting actual Jews with names to meeting ghosts or abstract Semites who are a category of theory from the "Higher Criticism."

What conclusion does Chesterton draw from this startlingly

delightful affirmation that he has actually seen a Jew? "It is a fact that I have seen several (Jews), and that many of them said exactly what the critic declared that no Jew could ever say." The title of Chesterton's column is: "On My Anti-Semitism." The very charge that he is "Anti-Semitic" is incoherent.

Meanwhile, Chesterton talked with actual Jewish friends, who, I am sure, told him exactly what they think. Chesterton concluded, from his actual experience, that one of the finest characteristics of the Jew is that he never "conceals his own vices from himself"—if this quality is what it means to be "Anti-Semitic," I believe, like Chesterton, that every Jew is himself proudly "Anti-Semitic"! ☺

#### CHESTERTON FOR TODAY

■ St. Thomas foresaw from the first the peril of that mere reliance on trade and exchange, which was beginning about his time; and which has culminated in a universal commercial collapse in our time. He did not merely assert that Usury is unnatural, though in saying that he only followed Aristotle and obvious common sense, which was never contradicted by anybody until the time of the commercialists, who have involved us in the collapse. The modern world began by Bentham writing the Defence of Usury, and it has ended in even the vulgar newspaper opinion finding Finance indefensible. (*"The Sequel to St. Thomas," St. Thomas Aquinas*)

■ The superiority of the universal shops is a pure superstition. It does not make for better quality in bread or meat that the same shopkeeper should be butcher and baker and candlestick-maker. It only means, if it means anything, the provision of bad candlesticks and worse candles for the inspection of doubtful meat and bread. (*New Witness*, Jan. 13, 1916)

■ The man whom we now call a Trust Magnate would be an ordinary criminal by mediaeval morality, as much as the wildest robber baron of romance could be a criminal by modern morality. (*Illustrated London News*, May 26, 1923)

■ There really is a peril. It is not so

much in the sins for which individual sinners are pilloried, as in the sins for which they are not pilloried; the sins that seem to be no longer regarded as sins at all...It is not that more people have broken the law; it is that the law is broken; broken in the sense of having broken down. (*G.K.'s Weekly*, April 4, 1925)

■ Invasion may be a sword; but peaceful penetration is a poison...To attack the culture is to attack the country, but it is to attack it from within. It comes from the sort of culture that has already contrived to get inside another culture; the sort unpleasantly suggested by bacteria-culture. Anybody who really loves a national tradition would rather it were attacked from without than eaten away from within. (*Illustrated London News*, April 9, 1927)

■ What some call the failure of Christianity, I should call the failure of those who chose to break up Christianity. (*The Forum*, June, 1928)

■ If I were Grand Inquisitor, I would try to burn out of the world not so much certain beliefs as certain phrases. I would argue with people about creeds; but I would kill them for catchwords. (*Illustrated London News*, June 5, 1915)

■ The brotherhood of men is a fact: which in the long run wears down all other facts. (*New Witness*, June 18, 1914)



Timely Essays on Chesterton's Timeless Paradoxes

# Interview with Robert Asch

by Dale Ahlquist

Robert Asch is the co-founder and co-editor of the *St. Austin Review*. He recently helped establish Chavagnes International College, an English Catholic boarding school in France. —Ed.

**GM** Please tell us about your background.

**RA** I was born in London, England, on October 16, 1968, of first-generation Canadians, both of them opera singers. My ethnic background is Jewish and English, and the cultural background of my Jewish ancestry is English, Spanish, Rumanian, Dutch, Austro-Hungarian and Ukrainian. I was sent to a French primary school, and then to St. Paul's School in London—Chesterton's alma mater, as it happens.

My parents were both practising Reform Jews, and I was brought up a practising Reform Jew: regular attendance at the Sabbath Service; Bar Mitzvah at thirteen; celebration of the major festivals, and so on. I have never been an atheist or an agnostic.

On the other hand, we were very much a culturally assimilated family—more so, I would say, than most practising Jews. Also, as I said, my parents were classical musicians, and our house was full of music: my parents' work, but also lessons (my mother taught and had a studio at home), concerts and records. My parents had a cultivated circle of friends, and my younger brother and I were made very welcome in the discussions that went on in the household. We were good readers early (my parents frowned on TV culture, and though television wasn't banned our access to it was restricted), and often taken to concerts, plays, exhibitions, museums. Now most of what we assimilated in this environment was of Christian—and usually Catholic—provenance.



We moved to Toronto in 1984 and I went to the University of Toronto, graduating with a B.A. in English and French literature in 1990. Early in 1991 I moved to Czechoslovakia, and taught English language, literature, and history in Prague until 1998. During this time I'd holiday in London. When I made up my mind to become a Catholic, in 1994, I went to Farm Street Church for instruction every six months or so till my reception in 1996.

I moved back to London in 1998 and began to work as an editor with the Saint Austin Press in 1999, since when I have been involved in Catholic publishing and education.

**GM** How were you first exposed to G.K. Chesterton?

**RA** I was aware of who he was at St. Paul's (there was a bust of him at the school), but I didn't read any Chesterton until I was sixteen. I had just finished Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, which I relished, and went in search of something similar—something *fin de siècle* and rich in verbal swordplay. I found *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which seemed to me just the ticket, as it proved to be. I was struck with the distinctiveness of Chesterton's wit, and that it seemed, uniquely in recent English literature, to dazzle as brightly as Wilde's. But, as I say, it was distinctive: the style was not the same, nor was the substance. I didn't read any more Chesterton until, I think, my last year at university; but *Thursday* had planted a seed, and when I found P.J. Kavanagh's *A G.K. Chesterton Anthology* at a bargain price, I bought it. That book exposed me to a fairly broad range of Chesterton's work.

**GM** What effect would you say Chesterton had on you?

**RA** Chesterton very quickly became a great favourite with me, and ultimately exercised a profound influence on my life. Humanly speaking, I probably owe more to Chesterton in the matter of my conversion than to anybody else. He wasn't working on a *tabula rasa*, though.

**GM** Go ahead and tell us the other influences.

**RA** God, as the Portuguese proverb has it, writes straight with crooked lines. Looking back now on the slow and often submerged process of my conversion, I can discern many influences—Plato, Sophocles, Bede, Pascal, Dr. Johnson, Newman, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Hawthorne, George Herbert, Dickens. There were artists, like Raphael, Giotto, Botticelli and Mantegna. There were the great architects of the Gothic and the Baroque. Above all, perhaps, there were the musicians: Mozart, Haydn, Purcell, Handel, Tallis, Schubert, Berlioz—yes, Berlioz! I couldn't possibly minimize the importance of Mozart and Haydn as influences, for example, particularly in their liturgical and quasi-liturgical music (I know some will raise an eyebrow at this, but I have no patience whatever with people who dismiss Mozart and Haydn Masses as “operatic”)—the Requiem, the Credo Mass, the Heiligmesse, the Seven Last Words of Christ, and the Creation. Also, *The Magic Flute*, which, despite its Masonic associations, had an influence of a wholly Catholic tendency on my sensibility.

**GM** It's interesting the effect music had in bringing you to the Catholic Church.

**RA** Yes, music can condition one's sensibility, but it can only address ideas obliquely. In Chesterton, however, I was confronted with the specific implications of what was attracting, influencing and nourishing me. I devoured anything of Chesterton's I could lay my hands on (no easy task in Prague in the days before the Internet): *The Man Who Was Thursday* was already one of my golden books; now came *St. Thomas Aquinas*; some of the

journalism and writings on Dickens; the comic poems; *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*—particularly the last chapter, which made a profound impression on me; above all, *Orthodoxy*. I can still see exactly where I was (a café in Salzburg) when I read it right through for the first time. Reading Chesterton accelerated my progress towards the Church more rapidly and consistently than any other repeated experience I can recall.

**GM** How did you feel as a Jew becoming a Catholic?

**RA** I still fondly remember the rather racy pleasure of being a Jewish admirer and defender of things Catholic. But all of this was certainly not to me merely a matter of belonging to a group (I have a constitutional distaste for groups) nor even of identifying with a cause or causes. It was a much deeper and dearer thing: the character and the quality of perceptions of life—of my life, and of Life in general—perceptions with which I was profoundly in sympathy. It was my patrimony, it was home, in a sense, and yet I was an alien—I was looking in from outside. Coming into the Church was, for me, very like Chesterton's description in *Orthodoxy* of the discovery that this ostensibly strange country is actually your native land.

There were, of course, creedal issues, which I should be obliged to accept, and which I came in God's good time to accept fully. Had I not done so, I suppose I should have had to face the melancholy prospect of feeling dislocated from all that was dearest to me; but you can't lie to yourself about things like that—I can't, at any rate. How I came to accept the dogmas of the faith is a long story, and probably best told elsewhere.

**GM** Did Chesterton strike you as anti-Semitic?

**RA** That is a difficult question to answer with a straightforward "yes" or "no." Let me say straight off that I do not think Chesterton was an anti-Semite. But in my personal experience the cards were, so to speak, stacked somewhat unfairly against him, at least initially. You will remember that, after *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the first considerable exposure I had

to Chesterton's work was Kavanagh's *Chesterton Anthology*. In the introduction to that book, Kavanagh asserts that, uniquely in the case of anti-Semitism, Chesterton breathed the air of his time too freely. So in a sense, I never had the opportunity of approaching Chesterton entirely without preconceptions—at least, never after *Thursday*. Jews are (unsurprisingly) very sensitive to anti-Semitism and perceived anti-Semitism, and I assumed that there was at least a fairly generally held perception that Chesterton was anti-Semitic.

Perhaps this was a blessing in disguise, as it made me more conscious of anything in Chesterton redolent of anti-Semitism. Had he been a Germanophile too, that might have been a bit much for me at the time; happily, he and Belloc were Francophiles, which suited me down to the ground. I know these are suasions rather than arguments, but you must remember I was a lad of sixteen-seventeen when I began to read Chesterton in earnest, and suasions counted for a good deal. In any case, I never felt uncomfortable as a Jew in Chesterton's company. I never felt, "Well, I'll put up with this nasty business, because there is some real sense in him, and, after all, he writes so well." That would have taxed my powers a good deal at that age. And one must remember that much of this material was polemical, the sort of writing where one would expect to find a bias if the author was a bigot. Sometimes—though this was rare—I'd come across a remark which gave me pain: I remember, for example, his referring, in *Orthodoxy*, to Oscar Levy as a "non-European alien"—though the reference is ultimately complimentary (he calls him "the only intelligent Nietzscheite"). There is an aspect of Chesterton's thought I am not entirely in agreement with here (and which I'll come to later), but, even when I first read it, I couldn't call it anti-Semitic as it contained an element of truth I was already only too familiar with—although I should put it differently.

**GM** You say you've run across rare passages in Chesterton that gave you pain because you did not agree with his assessment of the situation, but have

you ever run across anything that could be labeled anti-Semitic?

**RA** In all the hundreds of pages of Chesterton I've read, I can think of perhaps six or seven instances which a Jew today would be likely to construe—incorrectly, as I believe—as anti-Semitic. There were many more provocative references to Muslims and to Germans in his work than there were to Jews. My abiding impression was that Chesterton was a very good friend—something I should never have felt had I considered him to be anti-Semitic.

**GM** What do you say to people who say that Chesterton was anti-Semitic?

**RA** It depends on whom I'm talking to, and whether they care to listen. Chesterton is very much a late-Victorian/Edwardian writer, in style, sensibility and, obviously, in his frame of reference. It is one of the things that first drew me to him, just as it is perhaps the major reason that some readers are insensible to his stature. I am very much at home in the world of nineteenth-century letters: it is my chosen field; and it is a canard (and an increasingly common one) to think that any figure—no matter how far-sighted or prophetic—can be taken wholly out of context. Let us take a couple of cases of changing cultural contexts: Gustav Mahler was a German-speaking Jewish convert to Catholicism, born in what is now the Czech Republic. He was, of course an Austro-Hungarian composer, but Austria-Hungary no longer exists. What would we call him today? A German? A Czech? A Jew? An Austrian—with all that that now fails to imply?

Or suppose Quebec should separate from Canada: would that make an English Canadian born in nineteenth century Montreal a Quebecois? A French Canadian? The same is true of intellectual contexts. As circumstances change, the conditions of discourse are altered. We must be sensitive to these changes or we shall simply end by talking about nothing but projections of ourselves. Now, this is nowhere more evident than in matters of language. The meanings and inflections of words change. William Magee, for example, the Anglican Bishop of Peterborough,

referred to Wilfred Ward as a pervert, by which he meant that he had left the Church of England for that of Rome. So the term was understood. But I can easily imagine some modern clown declaring, “We can trace the Church’s pedophile problems right back to the Victorian age. Why, even reputable contemporaries described Ward as a notorious pervert!”

In this sense, should Chesterton have written today some handful amongst the millions of things he wrote ninety years ago, he would probably be called anti-Semitic. But we must ask ourselves two simple questions: would he have phrased them thus today, knowing how they would be construed? And are they, in fact, what we understand by anti-Semitism? The two points are connected, obviously. Did Chesterton hate the Jews—racially, socially or ethnically—and are his comparatively few “anti-Semitic” remarks an expression of such hatred? That, to me, is the real question; and my answer is an emphatic and confident “No.”

**GM** Can the charges against Chesterton be dismissed?

**RA** Yes, but I don’t think it is helpful to dismiss the accusations out of hand as merely cynical, stupid or dishonest. On the contrary, it is worth looking into why Chesterton made the few remarks on which the charge of anti-Semitism has been based. To the best of my knowledge, there is, as I indicated above, only one area where his attitudes are substantially at variance with mine, and that is the extent of the relationship between cultural identity and political autonomy: Chesterton tended to identify nations with political states—at least ideally; as is evident in his support, in World War I, for the cause of Polish independence (in which I agree with him, incidentally) and Bohemian (i.e. Czech) independence (in which I don’t). Now, between, say, the 1830s and 1945, Nationalism tended to be anti-Semitic, culturally, racially, or both. Also, the identification of nation and race was nearly universal. While the hatred of other peoples is as old as the hills, we tend to forget that genetic racism is a relatively recent phenomenon.

If we turn to the Jews in this period, we find them to be everywhere

a cultural and racial minority in environments of growing nationalist activism: an activism which tended to understand itself in racist terms. This was not necessarily or invariably an anti-Semitic phenomenon, nor were Jews themselves free from the tendency. The most famous theorist of race was Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882), whose magnum opus on the subject was *The Inequality of Human Races*. Because of his racism and influence on Wagner, Gobineau is usually thought of as an anti-Semite, but he wasn’t. He believed the Jews to be one of the superior races. The same was true of Benjamin Disraeli, a great hero to most Jews, who declared in *Conningsby* that “Race is everything; there is no other truth.” Indeed, *Conningsby*—an enormously stimulating political novel—is somewhat marred for me by the author’s occasional (pro-Semitic) emphasis on the importance of race. Ironically, our old friend Oscar Levy was both an admirer of Disraeli (he translated him into German) and much influenced by Gobineau’s racist theories: he wrote the introduction to the English edition of *The Inequality of Human Races*.

The reaction of assimilated Jews to the hostility of their environment tended to be of two kinds: a determination to succeed in defiance of every barrier erected against them, or a wholesale rejection of the establishment. In other words, one tends to find a high proportion, among assimilated Jews, both of conservative supporters of “The Establishment,” and revolutionaries. This is tragic, particularly as this attitude was the fruit of centuries of proscription and abuse. In any case, it is, with the new racism, one of the two main reasons for the anti-Semitism of nineteenth-century Nationalism: more often than not, assimilated Jews supported the Austrian, Russian or German imperial governments against which the Nationalist Poles, Czechs, Hungarians etc. were struggling.

After all, to the extent that the Jews had succeeded in attaining any measure of security and success, it had been in the established order the Nationalists were seeking to overthrow; nor could the Jews expect better treatment at the hands of (often) racist

ideologues: insofar as the Austrians, Germans and Russians governed multinational empires, they had (particularly in Austria) to tolerate—at least to a limited degree—ethnic groups other than their own; the Nationalists did not. And in Chesterton’s beloved France, with its aggressive political factions and endless social upheavals, anti-Semitic sentiment was rife: representatives of all parties, whether Republicans like Barrès, Royalists like Maurras and Léon Daudet, or Leftists like Clémenceau, were often coarse or violent in their anti-Semitic language. (In fairness, I should add that Daudet and Barrès both renounced anti-Semitism well before the advent of Nazism, while Maurras and Clémenceau were Germanophobes).

**GM** What about Chesterton’s use of the term “The Jewish Problem”?

**RA** To those who are intimately familiar with this era, the so-called “Jewish Problem” was not mere anti-Semitic rhetoric (though the tag might make us wince today with the advantage of hindsight). Indeed, there were many prominent Jews who felt the same way—it was, in fact, one of the presuppositions of the Zionist movement.

Now, as regards GKC, I should say that three things here are of particular relevance:

On the debit side, I believe that he exaggerated the continuity of nation-state and that, consequently, he doubted the extent to which Jews could become fully and happily integrated into a predominantly Gentile *patria*. He could see, as a matter of daily fact, the strife that existed between the Jewish communities and the Gentile majorities; and that there where national sentiment was strongest, this friction was most intense. He also disapproved of the cosmopolitanism of many secular Jews, which he tended to see (and here I agree with him) as antipathetic to patriotism.

To his credit, however, one must add two very important points:

In the first place, Chesterton’s nation-statism didn’t translate into anything like the fundamentally anti-Semitic position of most Nationalists. On the contrary, in accordance with his principles, it led him to espouse the cause of a sovereign state for the



Jews in the Holy Land. Chesterton was, in fact, a Zionist, and said as much, frequently. I'm not sure that any Jew of my acquaintance is aware of this fact, but fact it is.

Secondly—and perhaps more remarkably—Chesterton was one of the few men of his time who utterly rejected the tenets of race identity. It is impossible to read Chesterton in any depth without being confronted over and again with his contempt for the racist interpretation of culture. He is forever ridiculing “Celtic” culture, “Teutonic” culture, “Anglo-Saxon” culture, “Arian” culture. It led him to be—with Churchill—one of the few Englishmen to be utterly, unremittingly, hostile to Hitler and Nazism from the first. And in his anti-Nazi diatribes, we find GKC coming explicitly to the defense of the Jews. Again, this is a fact sadly unknown to most Jews.

**GM** This makes your point about the historical context all the more significant. Those who accuse Chesterton of anti-Semitism never seem to look at what else was going on during Chesterton's time.

**RA** Yes, that's true. And one could ask: Is it irrelevant to the question of Chesterton's supposed anti-Semitism that he excoriated Hitler as a racist in his weekly journalism when figures—still respectable in Jewish circles—such as Shaw and Lloyd George were praising Hitler as the greatest thing to come out of Germany since the Reformation?

Again, I wonder how many Jews are aware, today, of the pervasiveness of racial assumptions before World War II. Unless their attention is drawn to it, most people tend to assume that any writer not identified with anti-Semitism was probably fairly “sound” by modern P.C. standards—especially if they were “progressives,” like H.G. Wells. It is widely assumed (by Jews among others) that Wells (an author whose fictions I greatly admire) wasn't anti-Semitic because he was a “progressive.” But he was very anti-Semitic.

Finally, people simply weren't as sensitive to these issues—as hypersensitive, one might sometimes feel—as they have been since the War. One finds anti-Semitic gibes in the correspondence of Byron, for example,

and Byron was unusually sympathetic to Jews by the standards of his society. And it was Browning, a poet Jews regard (rightly) as pro-Semitic, who quipped:

We don't want to fight,  
By Jingo, if we do,  
The head I'd like to punch  
Is Beaconsfield the Jew.

**GM** A reference to Disraeli, who was known as Lord Beaconsfield. But that little rhyme is never brought up about Browning the same way “I am fond of Jews” is brought up about Chesterton.

**RA** Another man without a shred of vulgar anti-Semitism, Lord Rosebery, whose blissful marriage to Hannah Rothschild led to grumbles of Jewish political interference, has been accused of anti-Semitism because of a few casual witticisms.

Chesterton was probably the most prolific major author of the last century, and he was a religious, political, and cultural polemicist, a journalist with a weekly column for decades: it's simply not plausible that an author answering to that description could be anti-Semitic without leaving a large trail behind him, particularly in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. It must, I think, be conceded that Chesterton does not display any interest in the deep and ongoing relationship of the Jews to the Church and Cosmic History that we find in the writings of writers like Bloy, Péguy, Pascal, Solovoyov or Mickiewicz—but then, attitudes such as these have always been rare, and the same could be said of scores of authors never accused of anti-Semitism. But had Chesterton lived through the Second World War, I should not, for my part, be surprised if he had turned his attention to this phenomenon. And when Chesterton wrote, in response to the early Nazi persecutions, that he and Belloc were prepared to die defending the last Jew in Europe, I am quite prepared to believe him. There is nothing of bitterness in his tone, let alone hatred; I have always found him the very best company, the most lovable, as well as the most engaging, of writers.

**GM** As a Jewish convert to Catholicism, you must have some interesting

things to say to people on both sides of the aisle.

**RA** Well, actually, the only anti-Semitic experiences I had before my conversion were at the hands of Protestants and agnostics. Perhaps that was mere coincidence, but in any case, I never associated anti-Semitism with the Catholic Church particularly. I certainly never remember my parents saying anything of the kind. As a child, I had learned something of the pogroms in Eastern Europe, but though the Poles were Catholic, the Russians weren't; again, the Holocaust tended to be seen as a German crime, rather than a Christian one; certainly not a specifically Catholic one. At university, when I began to be more aware of Catholicism, I read Pascal—who is an admirer of Judaism—before I read Kavanagh, and then, in Central Europe, I found that it was the practising Catholics I met who were most friendly to Judaism—much more so than the secularists. Again, I was aware, at least from my university days, of John Paul II's very warm relationship with the Jews, which made an impression. And I have never forgotten a remark made by one of my parents' friends in a particularly interesting conversation from this time, that Luther was the first anti-Semite. I don't believe it influenced me, but it certainly didn't incline me towards a belief that the Catholic Church had a monopoly on anti-Semitism. And since becoming a Catholic (except where long-standing ethnic frictions are concerned—among the Poles or Irish-Americans, for example), I have not found anti-Semitism in Catholic circles at all.

I did harbor the suspicion, as a Jew—which I am persuaded I shared with most Jews (certainly most of my acquaintance)—that Christians generally were anti-Semitic, and, vaguely, a sense that perhaps all non-Jews were—at least in Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. And I'm afraid I don't believe that most Jews who feel this way try very hard to rationalize (responsibly, at least) what would appear to be such a extraordinary conviction.

Jews tend to be extremely sensitive to any perceived hostility or criticism, and this is, after all, only to be expected. What Christians must try

to realize—if they are going to reach Jews—is the extent to which centuries of persecution, extending well into this century, have branded these insecurities into the Jewish psyche. I suppose this is a truism, but it is one which cannot be repeated often enough. It has led to a warping of Jewish objectivity. For example, nineteenth century England and Austria-Hungary, where opportunities for Jews and acceptance of Jews were much more widespread than elsewhere, have nevertheless been characterized by Jews as fundamentally anti-Semitic cultures. While there is an element of truth in this (and sometimes more than an element), it also involves a considerable distortion of perspective.

**GM** And this distortion of perspective has led to what?

**RA** The saddest aspect of this is that it has led to an attitude of cultural solipsism among Jews: nothing is fully real, or at least important, outside the circle of Jewish concerns. In this sense, the creation of Israel is perhaps the best thing that has happened to Judaism in centuries, if only because they have had to shoulder the responsibility of governing other peoples. And this is the key to much historical anti-Semitism. Anyone with a knowledge of history is aware of the cruelty which nations visit on one another, and particularly on weaker cultures, vanquished nations or ethnic minorities. And minority cultures—or former minorities—are jealous of suffering: the attitude tends to be *no one* has ever suffered as *we* have suffered. The Poles complain of the Germans and the Russians, the Jews complain of the Poles; the Irish were abused under English rule, yet Irish-Americans have been notorious in their treatment of Jews and Blacks; the French Canadians also complain of abuse at the hands of the English, yet the Jews and Indians could tell you a thing or two about the French-Canadians; the Czechs were mistreated by the Austrians, the Slovaks and Gypsies by the Czechs; while the Slovaks, in their turn, have a very poor track record with Gypsies, Jews and ethnic Hungarians...and on and on it goes.

And now it is the Jews themselves, in Israel, who stand accused of the same crime.

Something that was apparent to me some time before my conversion was the inconsistency of the charge of anti-Semitism against specifically Christian culture: Islam is quite as anti-Semitic as the West, and both

pagan Rome and Macedonian Greece persecuted the Jews. If anything, it tended to confirm two things in my mind: the peculiar history and identity of the Jews, and the reality of fallen human nature. Perhaps, in a generation or two, conditions will be more propitious for a more magnanimous exchange of perspectives. ☞

### “THE JEWISH PROBLEM”

■ To recognise the reality of the Jewish problem is very vital for everybody and especially vital for Jews. To pretend that there is no problem is to precipitate the expression of a rational impatience, which unfortunately can only express itself in the rather irrational form of Anti-Semitism. (“The Problem of Zionism,” *The New Jerusalem*)

■ What is called Anti-Semitism is a bad thing; just as what is called Bolshevism is a bad thing. But just as denying the industrial problem will certainly produce Bolshevism, so denying the Jewish problem will always produce Anti-Semitism. (*G.K.’s Weekly*, April 18, 1925)

■ What is the matter with the attitude with many Jews is...the extraordinary delusion that there is no problem except the problem of the meaningless malice of Gentiles. Even if this were true...It would be the problem of why people all over the world should go mad on the subject of the Jews any more than of the Japanese. As long as a certain sort of quite intelligent Jew goes on maintaining that he and his people have never contributed at all to the misunderstanding, he will be more misunderstood than ever. That denial of all provocation is itself a provocation; that denial of the problem is itself a problem. (*G.K.’s Weekly*, April 11, 1925)

■ They are a problem because their presence presses in great bulk upon traditions and instincts that are not their own. (*G.K.’s Weekly*, April 18, 1925)

■ We have been told to treat the wandering Jew as a pilgrim. And yet...He who is detached, disgruntled, nondescript, intermediate, is everywhere made the excuse for altering what is common, corporate, traditional and

popular. (Ch. 4, *The Superstition of Divorce*)

■ This is an age of minorities; of minorities powerful and predominant, partly through the power of wealth and partly through the idolatry of education...The majority is always at a disadvantage...The minority is generally idealised, sometimes by its servants, always by itself. But my sympathies are generally, I confess, with the impotent and even invisible majority. And my sympathies, when I go beyond the things I myself believe, are with all the poor Jews who do believe in Judaism and all the Mahometans who do believe in Mahometanism, not to mention so obscure a crowd as the Christians who do believe in Christianity. I feel I have more morally and even intellectually in common with these people, and even the religions of these people, than with the supereilious negations that make up the most part of what is called enlightenment. (“The Shadow of the Problem,” *The New Jerusalem*)

■ The Zionist problem is complicated by a real quarrel in the Ghetto about Zionism. The old religious Jews do not welcome the new nationalist Jews; it would sometimes be hardly an exaggeration to say that one party stands for the religion without the nation, and the other for the nation without the religion. Just as the old agricultural Arabs hate the Zionists as the instruments of new Western business grab and sharp practice; so the old peddling and pedantic but intensely pious Jews hate the Zionists as the instruments of a new Western atheism of free thought. Only I fear that when the storm breaks, such distinctions are swept away. (“The Shadow of the Problem,” *The New Jerusalem*)



# Some of His Best Friends

by Dale Ahlquist

The first Junior Debating Club, 1891, front row, left to right: Lucien Oldershaw, G.K. Chesterton, Bernard Langdon-Davies. back row, left to right: E.W. Fordham, Lawrence Solomon, Digby d'Avigdor, Waldo d'Avigdor

St. Paul's School in London was the alma mater of John Milton and the Duke of Wellington. But the young G.K. Chesterton attended mostly because it was less than a mile from his home. He was a notoriously poor student, and yet it could be argued that here he launched his literary career, thanks to his involvement in The Junior Debating Club. This was a group of students who, on their own initiative, met and presented papers and argued. They printed and sold their own paper, *The Debater*, where Chesterton's first prose and poetry was published.

The organizing force was Lucien Oldershaw (who would become Chesterton's brother-in-law), but the heart and soul of the group was G.K. Chesterton, who was elected its chairman. The "librarian" of the group was E.C. Bentley (of clerihew fame), who recalled that Chesterton had an "extraordinary power—of which he was, and always remained, quite

unconscious—of inspiring affection and trust in all who had to do with him."

Other members of the small club included E.W. Fordham, (whom Chesterton described as "one of the most profoundly humorous men I

know"; who, in one of his many accounts of J.D.C. meetings, wrote: "A penny bun of the sticky order caressingly stung the chairman's honoured cheek, sped on its errand of mercy by the unerring hand of Mr. F."); Bernard Langdon-Davies (who was probably the first to recognize Chesterton's genius, and went on to become President of the Cambridge Union); F.R. Salter (who later became Chesterton's attorney and wrote a history of St. Paul's), R.E. Vernede (a promising poet who was killed in World War I).

The Junior Debating Club, said Chesterton, was "a singular brotherhood." The boys reveled in each other's company and thrilled at the intellectual fireworks in their debates. It is difficult to imagine fifteen-year-old boys expounding on history and literature with the depth and wit that these young men achieved, and their school days' friendship led to a close and lifelong camaraderie. And it is significant that fully one-third of the dozen members of the Junior Debating Club were Jewish. The two sets of brothers—Maurice and Lawrence Solomon, and Waldo and Digby D'Avigdor—would not



The Junior Debating Club in 1948 at the presentation of the bust of Chesterton to St. Paul's School: Fred Salter, Lucien Oldershaw, Lawrence Solomon, Maurice Solomon, E.C. Bentley, Waldo d'Avigdor



have belonged to the club had it not been for the insistence of that raging anti-Semite, G.K. Chesterton.

The Solomons, said Chesterton, represented the Jewish “love of home, the love of children, the meek and malicious humour, the tranquil service of a law.” He said they were “good by every standard.”

Maurice Solomon (1878-1954) went by the nickname Grey. Chesterton had to plead with Bentley to let Maurice into their circle of friends. Bentley not only overcame his prejudice, thanks to Chesterton, but ended up presenting the first book of clerihews to Maurice. For Gilbert’s nineteenth birthday, Maurice gave him a book of stories and poems by Bret Harte, signed “To Gilbert Chesterton, From his sincere friend, Maurice Solomon.” (One of Chesterton’s earliest published essays would be on Bret Harte.) Maurice became an electrical engineer and later a director for General Electric.

Lawrence Solomon (1876-1940) became one of Chesterton’s closest friends. He was a professor of history at the University of London, but when Chesterton moved to Beaconsfield, Lawrence left London and bought a home in Beaconsfield so that he could be close to Chesterton.

Waldo D’Avigdor (1877-1947) became an executive at a large life insurance company. Chesterton dedicated *The Innocence of Father Brown* to Waldo and his wife, Mildred.

Digby D’Avigdor (dates unknown) would devote much of his life to charity work, especially on behalf of Queen Charlotte’s Hospital, which cared for unwed mothers. At St. Paul’s, Gilbert made light of Digby’s fastidious appearance, and Digby, in turn, of Chesterton’s incredibly sloppy appearance. Digby’s other school friends could not understand why he would associate with Chesterton, whereas Digby thought it an honor to be his friend: “There is no half-way house about it, I used to wonder why he was decent to me.” He may have been the Jewish boy that Chesterton rescued from bullies at the beginning of his school days, an account described in the *Autobiography*. No one ever bullied Chesterton because he was big

## THE BALLAD OF GILBERT

by G.K. Chesterton

### “Mediaevalism”

If men should rise and return to the noise and time of the tourney,  
The name and fame of the tabard, the tangle of yules and gold,  
Would these things stand and suffice for the bourne of a backward journey,  
A light on our days returning, as it was in the days of old?  
Nay, there is none rides back to pick up a glove or a feather,  
Though the gauntlet rang with honour or the plume was more than a crown:  
And hushed is the holy trumpet that called the nations together  
And under the Horns of Hattin the hope of the world went down.  
Ah, not in remembrance stored, but out of oblivion starting,  
Because you have sought new homes and all that you sought is so,  
Because you had trodden the fire and barred the door in departing,  
Returns in your chosen exile the glory of long ago.  
Not then when you barred the door, not then when you trod the embers,  
But now, at your new road’s end, you have seen the face of a fate,  
That not as a child looks back, and not as a fool remembers,  
All that men took too lightly and all that they love too late.  
It is you that have made no rubric for saints, no raiment for lovers  
Your caps that cry for a feather, your roofs that sigh for a spire:  
Is it a dream from the dead if your own decay discovers  
Alive in your rotting graveyard the worm of the world’s desire?  
Therefore the old trees tower, that the green trees grow and are stunted:  
Therefore these dead men mock you, that you the living are dead:  
Since ever you battered the saints and the tools of your crafts were blunted,  
Or shattered the glass in its glory and loaded yourselves with the lead.  
When the usurer hunts the squire as the squire has hunted the peasant,  
As sheep that are eaten of worms where men were eaten of sheep:  
Now is the judgment of earth, and the weighing of past and present,  
Who scorn to weep over ruins, behold your ruin and weep.  
Have ye not known, ye fools, that have made the present a prison,  
That thirst can remember water and hunger remember bread?  
We went not gathering ghosts; but the shriek of your shame is arisen  
Out of your own black Babel too loud; and it woke the dead. ❧

and strong. Teasing him was also useless. As Digby recalled, Gilbert would accept teasing “with such unfailing good temper that there soon ceased to be any fun in it.”

All of the members of the Junior Debating Club went on either to Oxford or Cambridge, where they all distinguished themselves. All, but one. The one who became most famous was the one who did not go to the

university—G.K. Chesterton, whose formal education largely ended with St. Paul’s and the J.D.C.

The members of the Junior Debating Club continued to meet on a regular basis for the remainder of their lives. After Chesterton’s death, the group, led by Lucien Oldershaw, commissioned a bust to be carved of Chesterton which they presented to St. Paul’s, where it still stands. ❧

# “I Am Fond of Jews”

In Defense of Chesterton

by Dale Ahlquist

G.K. Chesterton said that his views about the Jews were “wildly misunderstood.” His views were actually quite simple and straightforward and articulate, as they were about everything else. It was the situation that was complicated. And still is. It is, in fact, even more complicated now because we have to try to discuss it from the opposite side of the event which is the flashpoint for all discussions of anti-Semitism: the Holocaust. In light of that event, we can be tempted to read things into what Chesterton said about the Jews that simply are not there. And our narrow perspective can prevent us altogether from seeing what really is there. The Holocaust was the natural fruit of the unnatural growth of all anti-Semitism that crept its way into the twentieth century. To say that G.K. Chesterton was one of the leaves on that noxious vine is a mean and wretched lie.

What is the basis for the charge of anti-Semitism against Chesterton? The evidence usually trotted is a few lines from some of his light verse, dialogue from some of his fiction, an open letter he wrote to a prominent Jew, or selected (or paraphrased) passages from his books and essays on history and economics. Also used against him is the company he kept: his brother, Cecil, and his friend, Hilaire Belloc, both of whom have also been accused of anti-Semitism. He also had a distant cousin named A.K. Chesterton who was the chief propagandist for the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s.

Chesterton addressed not only the accusations of anti-Semitism pointedly in his writings, defending himself on all counts, but throughout his life was praised (and sometimes criticized) for being a friend and defender of Jews. More importantly, he was both widely and intimately known as someone who was charitable towards

everyone. Although Chesterton spoke out eloquently against the ideas of people with whom he disagreed, he did not make personal attacks, and even his philosophical opponents held him in the highest regard and with great affection. He was often invited to speak at Jewish meetings and events, invitations he warmly accepted and at which he was enthusiastically received. And, yes (I write this brashly and defiantly), some of his best friends were Jewish. This began with several boyhood friends at St. Paul’s School to whom he remained close his whole life. One of them, Lawrence Solomon, actually moved to Beaconsfield as an adult after Chesterton settled there, just to be close to him. The first volume of Father Brown stories was dedicated to a Jewish friend, and Chesterton started a community theatre with a Jewish neighbor (who hesitated because she’d “heard” that Chesterton was anti-Semitic, but after meeting him realized that she’d been a fool to think so).

The shocking idea that got Chesterton into all sorts of trouble was his insistence that Jews were in fact Jewish. His view was that they were a distinct people, a distinction that is commonly recognized by both Jew and non-Jew who use the terms “Jew and Gentile.” But while they were a distinct people, they did not have their homeland. They were a nation without a country. The “Wandering Jew” was not merely an image of literature but a fact of history. Their settlement throughout Europe was unsettled. Though they often developed a loyalty to their adopted homeland, it was different from the natural loyalty of a native. Complete assimilation was problematic for one of two reasons: Jews would either have to give up their distinctiveness, which would be unfair to Jews, or the nation assimilating the Jews would have to give up its own distinctiveness,

which would be unfair and uncomfortable and probably cause resentment in that country. Chesterton said, “Jews must be free to be Jews.” In order for that to happen, he argued, they must have their own homeland, and Palestine was the logical place.

For Chesterton, a nation was an organic unity, a people who shared the same homeland, the same culture, the same language and literature, the same religion, the same race, the same heritage, and last and not least, the same government. This may be hard for us to grasp because America has never been like that. It has been a nation of exiles from its inception. And with the modern upheaval of European governments, the concept of nationhood has more or less followed the American idea, that is, a nation based on a contractual relationship and not an organic one; government is the primary unifying factor.

Chesterton respected the religion of the Jews and vigorously defended the rights of Jews to worship according to their faith. He expressed his admiration for devout Jews, and he acknowledged and lamented the oppression suffered by poor Jews in England and in the rest of Europe. But he also lamented the fact that Jews were not only on the receiving end of oppression. He was particularly mindful of rich Jews, especially those who had acquired their wealth through usury, which was a tool for the oppression and exploitation of the poor, including poor Jews. And in contrast to the devout Jew, he pointed out the complicated situation created by Jews who did not practice their faith or take their own religion seriously. They were restrained neither by religious precepts nor by patriotism to the nation in which they lived. The lack of restraint culminated in two apparently opposite evils: the gross accumulation of wealth and power by certain Jewish houses on the one hand and, on the other, the promotion of communism by Jewish intellectuals, who were as certain about economics as they were skeptical about religion.

Those who accuse Chesterton of anti-Semitism often overlook his enormous good humor. He did not take himself seriously and in his lightness,

his playfulness, his charitableness and good nature, he could point out human foibles and the sublime silliness of his fellow man without condemnation. If he stereotyped the Jews in some of his generalizations, it was because he had a great gift for generalization which was not limited to the Jews. He did the same thing with Cockneys, Irish, Germans, Americans, Moslems, Mormons, Puritans, Prohibitionists, Parliamentarians, Vegetarians, Christian Scientists, Quakers, and all the rest of us who march comically along in the grand human parade. He did not single out Jews when he made fun of their noses or their love of money, but neither did he spare them, because he did not spare anyone else, especially himself. What we love we can laugh at with impunity, which is why a husband and wife can laugh at each other, because, as Chesterton said, they both know they are both fools. We need to laugh at ourselves when we are silly (instead of being offended) and we need to repent when we are wrong (instead of rationalizing or defending ourselves).

Chesterton said things that can no longer be said in these hypersensitive, politically-correct times, but even in his own time, he bemoaned people who have “a blank and blood-curdling incapacity to see a joke.” He noted that for some reason telling a joke about a Jew was not the same as telling a joke about anyone else. In fact, even to discuss Jews was not the same as discussing any other group of people. This, if anything, accentuated his argument that there was “a Jewish Problem,” that no amount of lip service to the ideal of assimilation could change the persistent notion that there was a mutual uneasiness between the English and the Jews.

Some of Chesterton’s critics claim his Zionism is proof of his anti-Semitism. This is an argument that chooses to ignore everything else about Chesterton. His long support of Zionism was consistent with his ideas about what nations were, and it was also consistent with his whole philosophy of the God-given rights and dignity of the individual. He shared the basic ideas of Christendom that begin with the foundational idea that the Jewish God...is God; that the Jews historically

have a unique relationship with God; that the Jews lost their homeland; that they were exiles everywhere else on earth; that Jews were usually protected throughout Christendom but not at home there; that Christians usually recognized not only the Jews’ unique religion but their outstanding talent and intellect, which made for a sometimes awkward mixture of respect and resentment.

Chesterton also believed that Jews, unjustly locked out from honest, productive trades, excelled at what was long an outlawed trade: finance (the nice word for “usury”); that Christians further resented the subsequent success of the Jews and exacerbated the problem by indebteding themselves to Jews; that the best that small-minded bigots could do was call them Christ-killers; that hostility toward the Jews pushed them out of positions of privilege and also occasionally pushed poor Jews out of their homes; that Jews, as much as they may become attached to their host nations, might likely feel a greater loyalty to other Jews, even Jews of other countries; and that the Jews were still a people in exile, a people who deserved their own homeland and full, unquestioned, unmolested autonomy.

This was Chesterton’s position. He easily placed more blame on the Christians than on the Jews, but he did not hold the Jews blameless. He acknowledged the reality of “a Jewish problem,” the continuing conflict between Jews and non-Jews, which could not be solved by being ignored. And he proposed Zionism as a solution.

Of supreme importance in this debate is the fact that Chesterton was a vocal critic of Hitler, of his racial theories and his policies towards the Jews long before most people even acknowledged what Hitler was up to in the 1930s. Even though Chesterton hoped for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, he never advocated forcibly removing the Jews from Europe. If they were threatened he said he would die defending the last Jew in Europe.

Jews and non-Jews alike who knew Chesterton testified not merely that Chesterton was no anti-Semite, but that he was utterly kind and gracious

and good-natured toward all people. Since the personal accounts of Chesterton unanimously attest to the fact that Chesterton was friendly and charitable with everyone, we should be careful how we react when one of his phrases or descriptions jumps off the page at us. Should a passage smack of anti-Semitism, or appear in any other respect out of character, perhaps there might be an explanation for it. Chesterton’s character, so well demonstrated throughout his life and writings as generous, humble, loving and lovable, should take precedence and deserves to be the defining criteria to how we interpret him. In other words, we should be ready to grant Chesterton the benefit of the doubt and search for another explanation for what we find, rather than the knee-jerk “anti-Semitic” explanation.

There are three selections from his light verse that are almost always used as Exhibits A, B and C in the case against Chesterton. The first two are excerpts from longer poems that were published during his lifetime; the third a short poem published posthumously. The first thing to remember is that these are “light verse” that some people think must be taken seriously. Explaining a joke is never funny, but explaining a joke to people who don’t think it is a joke is more like torture.

#### Exhibit A

Oh I knew a Doctor Gluck,  
And his nose it had a hook,  
And his attitudes were anything but  
Aryan;  
So I gave him all the pork  
That I had, upon a fork;  
Because I am myself a Vegetarian.

This is from “The Song of the Vegetarian” from *The Flying Inn*, a book that can only be described as a romp. The song here is a drinking song, which begins:

You will find me drinking rum  
Like a sailor in a slum,

You will find me drinking beer like  
a Bavarian...

...because he is a rigid vegetarian, of course. The song is deliberately



aimed at vegetarians and is even more deliberately aimed at prohibitionists, which is the theme of the novel. But is it also aimed at poor Dr. Gluck? The astute observer will surmise that Dr. Gluck, based on his name, his distinctive nose and his non-Aryan attitude, is Jewish. Has he been defamed?

First of all, there's this Aryan business. This is not an attack on the Jews. On the contrary: it ridicules Teutonic racial theories, ideas that Chesterton certainly did think worth taking seriously. To say that Dr. Gluck doesn't have an Aryan attitude, as if a race could have an attitude, is actually a joke on German racism, not on Jews.

Second, the nose thing. Chesterton commonly made references to the hook nose when describing his Jewish characters, but he also made reference to Roman noses and Norman noses, and other types of noses. Noses are generally comical. What are we to make of it? Are the critics suggesting that he was simply determined to offend Jews even if it meant taking a cheap shot at their noses? Does his reference to Jewish noses prove that he was a vicious Jew-baiter, sneering at their very appearance? It seems the critics have forgotten who they are talking about. This was G.K. Chesterton, who was himself one of the funniest-looking men in England, and who was not unaware of that fact. He was at every caricaturist's mercy (though the funniest drawings of him are by the artist, G.K. Chesterton). If Chesterton's references to the Jewish nose are to be taken as evidence of anti-Semitism, then I detect an odor of pettiness among the critics. Our discussion of noses, unfortunately, continues below.

Third, the pork on a fork. Well, obviously that's supposed to be ironic.

There is no irony in giving pork to a Dr. Swanson or a Dr. McGee. Let's try to remember the point of the song. It is a rip of Vegetarians. The mock-Vegetarian who sings for us, unloads his meat, and naturally it is pork, and naturally he gives it to someone who is not supposed to eat pork. Chesterton considered the vegetarian philosophy quite misdirected. Giving up something was only meaningful if it was

given up as a sacrifice. A vegetarian giving up meat was significant only if he loved meat, not if he hated it. Vegetarianism was based either on extreme notions about health or even more extreme notions about animals. Jewish dietary law, on the other hand, was based on religion. The misplaced priorities of the vegetarian are demonstrated by the fact that he would give up his meat—pork—but give it to someone who has an authentic and non-vegetarian reason for avoiding that meat.

Comedy, said Chesterton, is about

the fall of man. We must first establish that man is dignified before we establish that it is funny when he does something undignified, such as sitting on his hat. We don't laugh at a tree falling down, but we do laugh at a man falling down. Why? Because only man can be absurd. Because only man can be dignified.

#### Exhibit B

They haven't got no noses,  
They cannot even tell  
When door and darkness closes  
The park a Jew encloses,  
Where even the Law of Moses  
Will let you steal a smell.

This is from "The Song of Quoodle," which is also from *The Flying Inn*. Quoodle is a dog. And Quoodle is the

singer of this song, which begins,

They haven't got no noses  
The fallen sons of Eve,  
Even the smell of roses  
Is not what they supposes,  
But more than mind discloses,  
And more than men believe.

It's a jocular poem about the superiority of dogs' noses to man's. It ends, "And goodness only knows/The Noselessness of Man."

But what about that line about the Jew? What's that doing there?

The assumption is that it must be another reference to Jewish noses, in this case, the Jewish noses that would steal a smell since there is no "Law of Moses" against it. But the lines don't read that way. In fact, although the song is about noses, there is in fact no reference at all to Jewish noses here. It is Quoodle the dog who is stealing the smell, stealing it from the park, "the park a Jew encloses." The Jew owns the park, and it is not accessible to the public after dark, but Quoodle can still enjoy the park without trespassing, because he can smell it.

If this is anti-Semitism, it's pretty thin stuff.

#### Exhibit C

I am fond of Jews  
Jews are fond of money  
Never mind of whose  
I am fond of Jews  
Oh, but when they lose  
Damn it all, it's funny.

Chesterton's biographer, Maisie Ward, who released this poem to the world, explained the circumstances under which he penned it. In 1911, when he was recovering from a broken arm, his doctor handed him a pen and paper to see if he could still write. Chesterton thought for an instant, wrote a name at the top of the paper and then spontaneously wrote the poem. Who was it about? Maisie Ward said that wild horses would not drag the name from her, but that the name of the subject is really "the key to this impromptu." Well, we don't know name or circumstances of its subject, but that has not stopped Chesterton's critics—obviously a humorless bunch—to draw larger and more sinister

conclusions about Chesterton's attitude toward all Jews.

The critic pounces: "He says he's fond of Jews, indeed! What he obviously means is that he hates them. Says he's fond of Jews, but he makes a generalization that Jews are greedy, and he thinks it's funny when they lose. How could anybody think it's funny when a greedy person loses money...?" At this point the critic pauses.

The problem with this poem is... it's funny. But we know we're not supposed to laugh, and we try not to laugh, but we do. Apart from the fact that it's about Jews, we know we're not supposed to laugh at anyone's misfortune. And one of the beauties of the poem is that Chesterton himself is trying not to laugh. He tries to hold it in, but, but (I know I'm not supposed to laugh), but..."Damn it all, it's funny."

Here I will invoke Mel Brooks, the great Jewish humorist: "Tragedy is when I stub my toe; comedy is when you fall down the stairs."

It is a clever little rhyme with a humorous, harmless jab at the end. But because it was written by Chesterton, the critics make it a very grave matter, and assume all kinds of darker implications.

Lest we think these jokes-in-a-poem went only in one direction, Chesterton-against-the-Jews, here is an example of the tables turned, indicating that there was some good-natured back-and-forth on the matter. Jewish poet Humbert Wolfe poked fun at Chesterton with this mock epitaph:

Here lies Mr. Chesterton  
Who to heaven might have gone,  
But didn't when he heard the news  
That the place was run by Jews.

We must add, however, that when Chesterton died, Wolfe wrote a moving tribute in verse, which concludes with the lines,

He does not need to knock against  
the Gate  
Who every action like a prayer  
ascended  
And beat upon the panels. Trumpets,  
wait  
For a hushed instant. We loved him.  
It is ended.

Leaving aside Chesterton's poetry and considering his fiction, one of the criticisms against him is that the villains in his books are Jews. This is a strong argument except for the fact that it is not true. Almost all of the Jews in Chesterton's fiction are minor characters. They might rarely be a suspect, but some one else turns out to be the criminal. It seems that a raging anti-Semite would make Jews the villains in his detective fiction. Or at least the murder victims. But Chesterton didn't. He murdered many a millionaire and not one of them was a Jew.

There is, however, the occasional snippet of dialogue that helps people label Chesterton as an anti-Semite, such as the following from the Father Brown story, "The Curse of the Golden Cross":

"But surely you won't deny that Jews were persecuted in the Middle Ages?"

"It would be nearer the truth," said Father Brown, "to say they were the only people who weren't persecuted in the Middle Ages. If you want to satirize medievalism, you could make a good case by saying that some poor Christian might be burned alive for making a mistake about the Homoo-usion, while a rich Jew might walk down the street openly sneering at Christ and the Mother of God..."

Now, I hate to give away the ending of a Father Brown story. So either skip a few paragraphs, or proceed at your own risk. Let's try to put these words back into the story from which they were taken.

The story line is that there is supposedly a curse on a holy relic in a tomb, and the person who explains the origin of the curse says that part of the history surrounding the relic involved a medieval Jew who was "ruthlessly burnt" at the stake for his "heresy and unbelief." Father Brown quickly figures out that the person who told this story is phony because the whole story is a phony. It is phony because, "the Jew couldn't possibly have been burned for his religion," Father Brown says, leading to the dialogue noted above, which then continues: "It was never a story of the Middle Ages; it was never even a legend about the Middle Ages. It was made up by somebody whose notions

came from novels and newspapers, and probably made up on the spur of the moment."

The other characters "seemed a little dazed by this historical digression." And one of them tactfully challenges Father Brown on the details of his version of history.

"Perhaps that is an exaggeration," admits Father Brown calmly. "But the plotter did not think the details of medieval history would matter much to anybody. And his calculation was pretty nearly right..."

The reason the solution to this mystery comes as a surprise (as all solutions to all mysteries should) is that our popular notion of medieval history is wrong. Jews may have been persecuted, but, as Chesterton says elsewhere, "Jews were never persecuted for professing Judaism as heretics were for professing heresy." Before you bring up the Spanish Inquisition, Chesterton already has. He argues that the Jews in Spain were not accused of being heretics but of being traitors and spies for the Moors. Yes, there were outbreaks of persecution in European history, but they were just that—outbreaks. When Chesterton's critics accuse of him of writing "selective" history, they have it backwards. To emphasize the persecutions is selective.

Here is another bit of dialogue that is used to demonstrate Chesterton's anti-Semitism. It is from one of his other fictional detectives, the languid Horne Fisher, who at the end of story, "The Bottomless Well" erupts with,

"It's bad enough that a gang of infernal Jews should plant us here, where there's no earthly English interest to serve, and all hell heating up against us, simply because Nosey Zimmerman has lent money to half the Cabinet...I don't believe in the Empire growing until it reaches the sky; I don't believe in the Union Jack going up and up eternally like the Tower. But if you think I am going to let the Union Jack down into the blackness of the Bottomless Pit, down in defeat and derision amid the jeers of the very Jews who have sucked us dry—no, I won't, and that's flat..."

Read that by itself and your reaction is, well, the same reaction of the

character in the story who hears it:

Boyle was regarding him with a bewilderment that was almost fear, and had even a touch of distaste.

But Boyle does something Chesterton's critics don't try to do; he attempts to understand the reason for Fisher's outburst. He says there must be something horrid about the things Fisher knows. Fisher replies that indeed there is, and says,

"I am not at all pleased with my small stock of knowledge and reflection."

And then Fisher walks away, "as if a little ashamed."

Perhaps that would be enough to soften the blow, but let's back up and explain more about the context of this passage. It begins by Fisher saying that he is "a little Englishman." He hates British imperialism, but loves England and will defend her. So when he finds himself at a remote outpost in the Arabian desert "that serves no British interest," he unleashes his displeasure at what he thinks put him there. He claims that the British policy-makers have cut deals with Jewish financiers, and he thinks the greater part of imperialism is driven by Jews wanting to build a financial empire. Staking out a new piece of the desert does not make England greater, but "opening new markets" certainly benefits that nebulous interest known as Finance, which is only beneficial to a rich and powerful elite.

Chesterton was opposed to financial imperialism and believed there was a Jewish aspect to it. Did he have any hard evidence? It is perhaps important to note that in the episode of Horne Fisher, noted above, the character admitted knowing some "horrid" things, and felt "a little ashamed" for even saying as much as he did. He was, after all, "The Man Who Knew Too Much." Perhaps Chesterton knew something more than even he was willing to say about it. Or perhaps he was a maniac. His critics claim that there was no basis to his ideas about "the Jewish International" and that there was nothing to the facts he claimed he knew and the actual conversations he claimed he'd heard. But there was one

episode in his life that his critics must either flatly deny or otherwise artfully explain away. It was a personal experience, and it arguably colored his views on this matter because it was painful and it touched people he loved. There really was a case of corruption in high places involving Jews. There really was a Marconi Scandal.



When Chesterton was accused of being anti-Semitic, he usually just laughed off the charge because he knew better, as did those who knew him. "The picture of me as a black persecutor and slanderer of Israel will, to those who know me, appear highly comic..." He even gently taunted his opponents to deliver proof of his anti-Semitism. Since it obviously was not obvious, it must be secret: "It would be an exaggeration to say that it is my daily habit to leap upon aged Jews in Fleet Street and tear out their teeth; so, given my admitted monomania on the subject, it only remains to suppose that my private house is fitted up like a torture chamber for this mode of medieval dentistry."

Also, then as now, when the charge was raised, it was often used as a criticism of last resort unrelated to the topic at hand. It was brought up only to weaken Chesterton when Chesterton's arguments could not be weakened. A typical example was a book by Arnold Lunn in which he attempted to critique Chesterton's conversion to Roman Catholicism. Lunn knew Chesterton was a lucid defender of Christianity, but he thought it a huge error on Chesterton's part to convert. Lunn could not understand the decision, but finding no openings in Chesterton's defense of the faith, Lunn attacked the one soft-spot he thought he was sure of: Chesterton's anti-Semitism. The specific issue wasn't even Chesterton's Catholic faith, but his ideas about Distributism, which Lunn associated with Catholicism. Chesterton wrote in response that Lunn "seems quite puzzled; and is forced at last to lug in the dear old legend that I lie awake at night devising tortures for the Jews. Most people have learned to smile at that legend by this time,

especially the Jews themselves...I hardly know how to deal with the innocence of a gentleman who really thinks there is something wildly anti-Semitic in the simple truth that Semites have been very prominent both in the Capitalist and Communist excess (the two philosophies are in fact the same)."

It is interesting to note that Arnold Lunn himself later became a convert to the Roman Catholic Church.

Chesterton understood that part of the uniqueness of the Jewish people is that they are both a race and a religion. In fact, they are that and something more: "The Jews are not like other races; they remain as unique to everybody else as to themselves." But he had no time for those "wild theorists who think that everything can be explained by 'race'...What determines the human part of history is religion and not race." However, when he urges Zionism as a solution to "The Jewish Problem," he uses a phrase that clangs loudly and unpleasantly in our modern ears: "separation of the races." But it absolutely must not be understood to mean anything like apartheid, which is a gross mockery of the idea of independent and organic nationhood. Zionism was the hope of many Jews, but there is no question that for some of them, the prospect of relocating to Palestine was akin to being banished to Lesotho or to an Oklahoma Indian Reservation or some other netherworld where "separation of the races" is simply an excuse for oppression and exploitation. Chesterton never insisted that Palestine was the only place for a Jewish homeland, but certainly the logical and historical place. And most Jews agreed with him. The idea was never banishment, but autonomy and nationhood for the Jews. This is the main thesis of "The Problem of Zionism," his controversial chapter in *The New Jerusalem*.

When Chesterton said that Jews were a distinct people, he was not attacking them, putting them down, or otherwise maligning them. When he said that they were foreigners, exiles, strangers in a strange land, he said something that Jews themselves had recognized for more than a thousand years. A rabbi who read *The New Jerusalem* affirmed Chesterton's observation and



said that however much Jews come to love their adopted country, it is always a hard love. And it is not without significance that at each Passover, the Jews pray, "Next year in Jerusalem."

One of the main reasons Chesterton supported Zionism was that it would create the opportunity for Jews to own and work their own land, like the common peasants of any other solid country. This was a simple virtue unavailable to Jews for centuries. But he pointed out that there were many problems for Zionism. The Jew "is not only unpopular both in the East and West, but he is unpopular in the West for being eastern and in the East for being western." In Europe, he is suspected of Asiatic secrecy, in Asia, of European vulgarity, which was one of the reasons, he predicted, that Palestinians would be opposed to the Jewish settlement of Palestine. But Chesterton said that when he stood at the Temple Mount, where a mosque sits on the site of the ancient temple of Israel, he could not escape the idea that the land belonged to the Jews.

After *The New Jerusalem* was published, Chesterton visited America, where he said he was "besieged by Rabbis lamenting my 'prejudice.'" He explained, of course, that he was not prejudiced, and also explained the strange American misuse of that word. "Prejudice" meant to pre-judge. Chesterton insisted that all of his opinions about the Jews were based on his experience with Jews, not on any preconceptions. And furthermore, his experience of Jews was that he liked them, not that he disliked them, as the term "prejudice" seemed to imply.

On each of his two trips to America, he was frequently and warmly hosted by Jews. What surprised him in America, however, was that he observed a great deal of anti-Semitism in situations and from people that he never would have expected. Pick up an American newspaper or magazine from around 1920 and see how short a time it takes to find a reference openly offensive to Jews. Chesterton was surprised, for instance, upon meeting Henry Ford to discover that he was anti-Semitic. Chesterton considered America much the way America considers itself, the land of toleration and

assimilation and humanitarianism and idealistic indifference. The presence of anti-Semitism in America, of all places, in his mind further supported his arguments for Zionism. If the Jews could not assimilate in America, which was, in effect, a nation of foreigners, a mixture of cultures, and with no great weight of a long history behind it, they certainly could not be expected to assimilate in a European nation like England, where in more than a thousand years they still had not assimilated.

In 1911, Chesterton was interviewed in *The Jewish Chronicle*. While the interviewer expresses appreciation for Chesterton's defense of the Jews, he asks him how he dared suggest that there was a "problem, and, above all, a peril, in 'the international and largely secret power of the great Jewish houses.'" The interviewer is surprised that Chesterton, of all people, could be "afflicted with such a bogey."

Chesterton responds, "I can only look at things as they are...and, of course, it gets me into no end of troubles. When I find that a great banking house, controlling vast financial resources, has branches in every capital, I think I am correct in calling the power it possesses 'international.'"

The interviewer goes on to raise the usual objections which are still raised against such a viewpoint: Surely other businesses besides banking are international? Surely other people besides Jews are capitalists, as well as "monopolists, wire-pullers, war-makers and strike-breakers, and buyers and sellers of national honor?" Surely there are Jews who are loyal citizens? And surely not all Jews are rich and powerful; are not most poor? In other words, why pick on the Jews: they're no better or worse than anybody else. They shouldn't be singled out for anything at all.

Chesterton's response is that it is historically and culturally undeniable the Jews are a distinct people, a nationality without a nation. They are in most ways better than other peoples, but being better does not mean being the same. And being better, he would expect better from them: not to oppress people by the power of capital, not to oil themselves when they have struck oil, and most importantly, to

live up to their own religious standards. (He would make the same point in *The Everlasting Man* about Christians who fall short of their own standards and ideals: "The Christian is only worse because it is his business to be better.") As for their loyalty, he does not question their full and rightful participation as citizens in any country, but contends that generally they are still allied "rightly and justifiably" to their own people, who may be citizens of other countries. He maintains that a Jewish capitalist is different from an "ordinary" capitalist because the latter may be restrained by some duty to his native soil. What Jews need is the opportunity to live freely on their own native soil with their own people.

The interviewer says that in some people's minds, Zionism and Anti-Semitism are one and the same.

Chesterton replies, "That is arrant nonsense. It is equivalent to saying that a man who is anxious for the preservation of the supremacy of the English race is an Anglophobe."

They debate the benefits and practicality of Zionism, with Chesterton stating his belief that for "Jews who are anxious to see the Jewish question solved," Zionism seemed the right course.

"Otherwise...?" asks the interviewer, perceiving that something has been left unsaid.

"Well," says Chesterton, "history will go on repeating itself for the Jew. As has been his past, so his future. My point is this: That the Jews, being landless, unnaturally, alternate between too much power and too little, that the Jew millionaire is too safe and the Jew peddler too harassed. It is not likely that millionaires among you will be otherwise than the very few. Therefore, for the many, I am afraid the future will be as the past has been—murder, outrage, persecution, insult, moral and physical torture, wandering unrest, oscillations of comfortless abasing and uncertain toleration with grinding, enervating, cramping, disabilities: in short, the Jew—at least for the most part—always burnt."

Chesterton did not live to see it, but his analysis would prove to be horribly and explicitly accurate just three short decades after this interview.

In 1936, in a jarringly entitled essay, "The Judaism of Hitler," Chesterton argued that Hitler's ideas of a superior race were derived from German Protestantism, which was obsessed with Old Testament ideas about a Chosen People rather than New Testament ideas about a Universal Church. Protestants tried to make themselves the Chosen People, and though Protestantism continued to splinter and degenerate into a multitude of sects and strange nineteenth-century philosophies that could hardly be recognized as Christian, the idea of "a chosen people" remained. It was present in Nietzsche's theory of the Superman. Hitler took the concept of the Chosen People and applied it to a nebulous grouping called the Aryan Race. Chesterton found it grimly ironic that Germans would try to eliminate the Jews, to whom they were so culturally indebted.

When the outright persecution of Jews began in Germany, it was G.K. Chesterton who was among the first to speak out against it. "Thousands of Jews have recently been rabbled or ruined or driven from their homes. They've beaten, bullied poor Jews in concentration camps. Heartily I do indeed despise these Hitlerites." The rest of the world, for the most part, was silent—especially the prigs who called G.K. Chesterton an anti-Semite.

The year after Chesterton's death, the great American Rabbi Stephen Wise wrote:

Indeed I was a warm admirer of Gilbert Chesterton. Apart from his delightful art and his genius in many directions, he was, as you know, a great religionist. He as a Catholic, I as a Jew, could not have seen eye to eye with each other, and he might have added "particularly seeing that you are cross-eyed"; but I deeply respected him. When Hitlerism came, he was one of the first to speak out with all the directness and frankness of a great and unabashed spirit. Blessing to his memory!



I once challenged a critic who referred to Chesterton as an anti-Semite, laying out for him much of the evidence I have laid out here, and his

rebuttal was: "Well, there are anti-Semites and there are anti-Semites."

In other words, the term means whatever its users and abusers want it to mean, as long as the meaning is bad. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with reality. It is, as Chesterton said, an "unreality [that] expresses itself by looking at the labels of things, and never at the things themselves."

Though Chesterton's accusers are monotonous, they cannot get their stories straight. There are some who say that Chesterton was anti-Semitic early in his life but then reformed, but also those who say that Chesterton's early writings are not anti-Semitic but that he became a Jew-Hater after his conversion to Catholicism.

A modicum of honest research would reveal that

Chesterton was amazingly consistent from beginning to end—not as an anti-Semite, but as a defender of the Jews. He wrote about the Jews in one of his earliest published pieces, a 1901 review of a book entitled *The Ancient Scriptures of the Modern Jew* by David Baron. In the review, Chesterton says that the Jews are "immortal."

Them we can never dethrone: they discovered the one central thing no modern man can help believing: whatever we think

or do or say we are all bound to the wheel of the stars which can only have a single centre. This awful simplification of things they discovered, as it has since been discovered by innumerable sages. But their unique historic interest lies in this: that by a strange circumstance, that has every resemblance to a miracle, they discovered it in the morning of the world.

Regarding the problems concerning the modern Jew, Chesterton invokes Dr. Max Nordau, the distinguished Jewish physician and prolific writer and Zionist, who spoke "with

splendid scorn" of the decadents of his own race: the Jewish millionaires. No gentile, says Chesterton, would dare speak of the Jewish millionaires as Dr. Nordau speaks, referring to them as "these money-pots who despise what we honour and honour what we despise." Chesterton also notes that Dr. Nordau says that the Jewish "plutocrats" are shown more honor and entitlements by the Christian community than by the Jewish community.

However, Chesterton casts no blame on the Jews for the "Jewish plutocratic problem." Rather, the blame is placed squarely on the society that dealt so unfairly with the Jews. The real lesson to be learned, he says,

...is the utter futility of attempting to crush a fine race. In science men

*G. K. Chesterton was one of the truly good people who has graced this earth. He was good, and he did war with all the enemies of human dignity and freedom. If he occasionally did battle with Jews, it was not because they were Jews, but because he felt they were on the wrong side of some particular argument.*

know that no force is ever destroyed; but the fact has yet to be learnt in politics. There are a thousand things that a wronged people may become—a rival, like America; a clog, like Ireland; an internal disease, like Jewish commerce; but it always becomes something. We forbade to the Jews all natural callings except commerce, and today commerce is what might be expected from being eternally recruited with all the most intellectual sons of a most intellectual people. We pray that the error may not be repeated in certain

corners of the earth. To avoid a repetition of it would be far worthier than the frivolous Continental anti-Semitism which can find no answer to Jewish triumphs, except to flourish tauntingly the image of a martyred Jew upon an Aryan gibbet.

Everything in this paragraph bears repeating. The Jews are a wronged people. And a great people. They will not be crushed. The whole society is suffering because of injustice to the Jews. There will be grave consequences if the problem is not solved. But instead of looking at the

big picture, too many people are distracted with minor and immediate resentments, “frivolous anti-Semitism,” which can do no better than call the Jews Christ-killers. It would be hard to imagine a more eloquent and outright condemnation of anti-Semitism.

At the end of his life, in writing his *Autobiography*, Chesterton touched on the subject one last time:

Oddly enough, I lived to have later on the name of an Anti-Semite; whereas from my first days at school I very largely had the name of a Pro-Semite. I made many friends among the Jews, and some these I have retained as life-long friends; nor have our relations ever been disturbed by differences upon the political or social problem. I am glad that I began at this end; but I have not really ended any differently from the way in which I began. I held by instinct then, and I hold by knowledge now, that the right way is to be interested in Jews as Jews; and then to bring into greater prominence the very much neglected Jewish virtues, which are the complement and sometimes even the cause of what the world feels to be the Jewish faults. For instance, one of the great Jewish virtues is gratitude. I was criticised in early days for quixotry and priggishness in protecting Jews; and I remember once extricating a strange swarthy little creature with a hooked nose from being bullied...[he was] being tossed from one boy to another amid wild stares of wide-eyed scientific curiosity and questions like, “What is it?” and “Is it alive?” Thirty years afterwards, when that little goblin was

a great grown bearded man, utterly remote from me in type and trade and interests and opinions, he had a sort of permanent fountain of thanks for that trifling incident, which was quite embarrassing. In the same way, I noted that strong family bond among the Jews... Doubtless, I came to know the Jews because in this sense they were a little abnormal, as I was then becoming a little abnormal myself. Yet there is nothing I have come to count more normal, and nothing I desire more to restore to its normal place, than those two things; the family and theory of thanks.

G. K. Chesterton was one of the truly good people who has graced this earth. He was good, and he did war with all the enemies of human dignity and freedom. If he occasionally did battle with Jews, it was not because they were Jews, but because he felt they were on the wrong side of some particular argument. It is a paradox that when he treated Jews like anybody else, in making jokes, in holding them to the same standards, he was labeled anti-Semitic, but if he treated them as a unique people, even as a unique nation, he was also labeled anti-Semitic.

The most unbearable part of those who accuse Chesterton of anti-Semitism is their smugness. They presume to sit in judgment of Chesterton, not from the rather lateral position of literary critics who are certainly entitled to write literary criticism, but from a lofty position of self-righteousness where they presume to look down on Chesterton and make pronouncements

about his “dark side.” Part of it may come from the unholy need to find some sort of dirt on Chesterton. They cannot stand someone who is both wise and innocent. Finding they are no match for his wisdom, they try to dredge up something dastardly in his character which they figure will be enough to damage his credibility regarding everything else. Critics have made pathetic attempts to infer from his writings that he was a sadist, a misogynist, a racist, a drunk, or a homosexual (although I understand this last one is no longer considered a character flaw, and who knows, if someone can prove it, it could mean Chesterton’s rehabilitation among the intellectuals). But the criticism that gets the most mileage and the most instantaneous impact is that Chesterton was anti-Semitic. And almost no proof is needed. The accusation is as good as an indictment. Not only do his detractors not consider all the evidence, they deliberately ignore the known evidence in his favor, and they deliberately color the apparent evidence against him. The result is ironic: prejudice and discrimination against Chesterton. He has been denied membership in the club.

The smallness of his critics is what is most apparent about them. Anyone who spends an extended amount of time reading Chesterton is struck by his goodness, his large goodness. It makes his critics all the smaller. They have not proven worthy of being his judge. ☞

## The Marconi Scandal

by Dale Ahlquist

I recently encountered a writer who, in the midst of claiming that G.K. Chesterton was anti-Semitic, referred to the Marconi Scandal as “a sort of British version of the Dreyfus Affair.” This crass misrepresentation of history reflects the whole problem with Chesterton’s modern critics. Not only do they know nothing about Chesterton, they know nothing about the times in which he lived.

So what was the Marconi Scandal? Cecil Chesterton, G.K.’s brother, was editor of *The New Witness*, a paper to which G.K. contributed several poems and a few essays. Cecil was eager to expose corruption in high places, and in 1912, he uncovered a case of insider trading involving some government ministers. The British government was about to award a huge contract to the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company to build communication towers for what

would be the state-owned telegraph system. Marconi’s general manager was Godfrey Isaacs. Knowing of the pending contract, Godfrey Isaacs and his brothers, Harry and Rufus, bought thousands of shares in the company. Rufus Isaacs was Attorney General. He sold his own shares to David Lloyd George, later Prime Minister. After Cecil’s accusations were published, a Parliamentary inquiry was held but the controlling Liberal Party very effectively covered up any evidence of wrong-doing. When Isaacs and Lloyd-George testified, they omitted relevant facts, saying they hadn’t bought any shares in *British* Marconi—when in fact they had bought



shares in *American Marconi*, which was owned by British Marconi.

The Isaacs brothers were rich and were certainly influential. And they were Jews. Cecil vigorously went after Godfrey Isaacs in the pages of *The New Witness*, and eventually Godfrey

hired London's most famous attorney, Sir Edward Carson, and sued Cecil for libel.

The trial, amazingly, was not about the truth of Cecil's statements but only whether they damaged the reputation of Godfrey Isaacs.

Cecil, acting as his own counsel, lost. He got off with a fine instead of a prison term. Most people forgot about the scandal. G.K. Chesterton did not. He was certainly disappointed with the Liberal Party, which he had once hoped would defend the interests of the common man against the interests of big money. He was disappointed in the justice system, which provided no justice. He was disappointed with the Liberal press, which was more worried about protecting the Liberal Party than with telling the truth. Chesterton lost his job with the *Daily News* because he spoke out against their cowardliness on the scandal.

Six years later, as World War I drew to a close, Cecil died in a French military hospital and Rufus Isaacs, by then elevated to peerage, accompanied Lloyd-George to France to negotiate the peace treaty.

The fact that his brother had just given his life for his country prompted Chesterton to write an open letter to Rufus Isaacs, then Lord Reading, in *The New Witness*. This letter is often cited as evidence that Chesterton was anti-Semitic. Yet there is no smoking gun here. There are actually few references to the Marconi Scandal. Rather, he urges Lord Reading to resign from the War Department. He says pointedly that he does not consider him fit to be negotiating any deals on behalf of England. He repeats his suspicions about Jewish international trade and the problem of divided loyalty. He implies in the letter what he states explicitly elsewhere, that during World War I, the

trading among the international Jewish companies was in fact trading with the enemy. But he makes it clear that he has never desired disaster for the Jews. He says he understands Lord Reading's position better than most, and he asks that his own position, Zionism, which

was the position of many in England, not be dismissed as anti-Semitism when it "may well prove the last serious attempt to sympathise with Semitism." He fears that if this position is ignored "darker days yet may come."

The Marconi

Scandal could not have been more different from the Dreyfus Affair. Dreyfus was a Jewish officer in the French Army who was falsely accused of being a traitor and was imprisoned on Devil's Island. The French intellectuals demanded justice and talked about nothing else in the press. The Isaacs brothers were not falsely accused, were in fact guilty, and were never punished; and almost everyone looked the other way with an embarrassed cough. The key political players should have been forced to resign in disgrace; instead they went on to lead the postwar government. It was a case that actually did involve high finance, international dealings, secret deals with government officials, and Jews. It may have been the only case in Chesterton's experience for which there was hard evidence, but it was real and not imagined.

It does not excuse the fact that there were indeed articles in *The New Witness* under Cecil's editorship that were embarrassingly anti-Semitic—not so much what Cecil Chesterton wrote but what he, as editor, allowed others to write. He was fair-minded enough to publish rebuttals to such views, and he, like his brother, always defended poor Jews who had been treated unjustly. If you don't know who Stinie Morrison is, look him

up. He really was the British equivalent of Dreyfus: an innocent Jew wrongly convicted of a crime. But he had the disadvantage of being poor. And who was his chief advocate? Cecil Chesterton. Yet this kind of cry for justice was simply ignored. Cecil, however, was not ignored when he demanded justice for the rich, that is, that rich criminals be punished. He was attacked in an attempt to silence him. The Marconi affair ought to have been the downfall of the Isaacs brothers, but instead it was the downfall of Cecil Chesterton. Gilbert was not directly involved, but he would always be associated with it, especially since he had to take over the editorship of his brother's newspaper after Cecil's tragic death. What no one has ever pointed out is that after Gilbert became editor, those anti-Semitic writers who had previously contributed articles no longer appeared in the paper.

Chesterton's letter to Rufus Isaacs may have been the most uncharacteristic thing he ever wrote, in tone if not in substance. His critics, however, attempt to portray it as something typical, and they are quite unable to take into account that it was written by a man grieving his brother's death. Even so, the letter does nothing to demonstrate that Chesterton is anti-Semitic. Nothing.

There are two postscripts to the story: Rufus Isaacs resigned from the War Department four days after Chesterton's letter was published.

There is no way of knowing whether

Chesterton's letter had anything to do with it. His political career, however, continued, as he was later appointed Lord Chief Justice. By most accounts he was a noble man, and remained personally distressed by his association with the Marconi Scandal the rest of

his life. His brother Godfrey Isaacs was involved in other questionable trading incidents, other libel actions, and eventually lost most of his wealth. After his financial downfall, he converted to Catholicism. ☚

*The trial, amazingly, was not about the truth of Cecil's statements but only whether they damaged the reputation of Godfrey Isaacs.*

*The Isaacs brothers were not falsely accused, were in fact guilty, and were never punished; and almost everyone looked the other way with an embarrassed cough.*

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# More Real Than We Can Imagine

by Kevin O'Brien

RONDALE, Ala.—I used to think that the intense joy I felt at the annual G.K. Chesterton conference was a bit unreal. I would often feel the same after a successful performance on stage—that the ecstasy and camaraderie of performing good material before appreciative audiences was a kind of dream or illusion and that the life I'd have to return to—the everyday life of family squabbles and work troubles—was the real world. Indeed, EWTN, where I, Dale Ahlquist, and a troop of actors and actresses gathered in August to film Season 5 of *The Apostle of Common Sense*, was the prime example of this. There is something ideal about the place.

First of all, Holy Mass at EWTN is pristine and devout, and more beautiful and simple than it appears on TV. Beyond that, literally every other person who works at EWTN has a miracle to recount—a miracle they've seen or experienced, often a miracle that has brought them there. The workers are working for all the right reasons. Everyone we encounter

is devout, cheerful, and filled with the joy that comes from knowing you are right where God wants you to be. The Blessed Sacrament is both geographically in the center of the EWTN campus, and more importantly at the heart of the intentions of the entire network. And while all this could easily combine to produce an atmosphere of sanctimoniousness, there remains something very down-to-earth about the place—perhaps thanks to the charism of their foundress, Mother Angelica herself.

It is true that many of the actors I've ventured with to EWTN can't stand the place. I've seen it make people's skin crawl. In fact, the first time I met Dale Ahlquist and Chuck Chalberg was in 2004 when I brought a crew of St. Louis actors and actresses there to dramatize scenes for Season 3. One of my actresses piped up early with effusive praise about her favorite candidate, Howard Dean. "Chesterton was right!" Dale interjected. "Women should never have been given the right to vote." Sarah did not take well to this



Kevin O'Brien as Father Brown, Julian Ahlquist as Flambeau, in a scene from "The Honour of Israel Gow"

jocular observation, and spent the rest of the week fuming at Dale, at Chesterton, and at the "stifling atmosphere" of EWTN.

So EWTN is like the Church. You either love it or hate it. And like the Church, it's a place where people can grow in love for one another as they grow in love for Our Lord. At least, that's what the Church should be like, although in most parishes I've been to that ideal is rarely realized.

But if you spend two weeks at EWTN with Dale and a crew of Chestertonian actors, you'll swear you're in heaven, and that the real world could never be like this.

Our first week together was filled with unreality. On Day 1, Frank C. Turner (Canadian character actor who has appeared in more than fifty feature films and several television series) and I dramatized a scene from Chesterton's novel *The Ball and the Cross* in which I portray Professor Lucifer and Frank the monk Michael. Filmed before a green screen, the savvy technicians made us look like we were in a spaceship hovering above London.

The next day saw our versatile cast portraying the guests on Dale's segment, "Religion Today." As usual, before the filming I suggested to Dale that I could play all the parts. "You can't play the feminist, Kevin," he replied, "You don't look enough like a man."

The character Stanford Nutting sees action in at least three episodes of the fifth season. In one, he plays



Dale's set gets invaded.





In the newest season of *The Apostle of Common Sense*, Dale Ahlquist hosts a discussion on the Problem of Evil with a panel of “experts” (Frank Turner as Dr. Thaddeus Gorgonus; Kevin O’Brien as Stanford Nutting; Ashley Ahlquist as Rev. Dr. Wilhelmina Fritz; and Eric Kaiser Johnson as Professor Kaufmann Valterhosen. That’s Director Fred Williams sneaking onto the screen.)

an adjunct at a junior college, where he teaches his favorite class, *Religion in the Modern World*. When a student asks Stanford if he’s ever read Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*, Stanford replies, “I’ve never read *Orthodoxy*! I object to the title!” Funny as this may be, it’s an actual line an ex-seminarian spouted at a St. Louis Chesterton Society meeting years ago. Little did he know his words would be immortalized on worldwide television and his very person immortalized in the form of the recurring character Stanford Nutting. The inspiration is his; the sweater, however, is mine.

Season 5 will also see another segment of “Ask Mr. Chesterton,” in which audience members portrayed by actors grill our buddy Gilbert. And new feature “Chesterton’s Toy Theater” sees one of Chesterton’s toy theater plays come to life.

We filmed this and more during our first week in Birmingham, including a scene from *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, a dramatized scene from Chesterton’s autobiography, a selection from “The Blue Cross,” and snippets featuring characters from Seneca to Thomas Jefferson. The fifth season promises to be the best yet, and all you’ll have to do is wait about twelve to fourteen months to see it—when the new episodes are expected to air—and about another nine months after that

for the DVDs to be released.

We had to wait a bit, too, for no filming was scheduled over the weekend. So we amused ourselves with wine, cigars, and a good old-fashioned book-burning. We purchased a book at a used book shop in Irondale and later burned it. The book was entitled *How to Disagree and Still be a Faithful Catholic*. It was the best two dollars we ever spent, for it kept a work of abject heresy out of the hands of unsuspecting readers. A sample: “While no one would argue that Church doctrine should be based on public opinion, nevertheless public opinion can indicate when a doctrine is wrong and should be changed.” (The author was not Stanford Nutting, though he easily might have been.)

When Monday rolled around, Dale and our actors were in for an entirely new adventure. We spent the second week at Mother Angelica’s shrine in Hanceville filming an episode for my series, *The Theater of the Word Incorporated*. The episode is a kind of movie version of the Father Brown story, “The Honor of Israel Gow,” adapted for the screen by Dale with a little help from me and Michael Masny, our producer at EWTN.

We returned to the studios in Irondale on Friday and filmed an episode of my series in which dozens of people invade Dale’s set to watch

*The Surprise*, to Dale’s annoyance and dismay.

So that was a “wrap,” as they say in television.

And to wrap this article up, I return to the question I posed at the beginning. Are such places of joy, as the Chesterton conference, the stage, the studios of EWTN, less real than the real world around us? No. Such places, such joys, are intimations of heaven, and like heaven, more real than we can imagine. ☸



Dale portrays the Late Earl of Glengyle in “The Honour of Israel Gow”



# An Accidental Death

by John Peterson

Detective Lieutenant David Carlson had wrapped up his investigation of a fatal fall from the balcony of a sixth-floor condominium. There would be an inquest, of course, but in spite of certain peculiarities in the case, Carlson didn't see how anybody could be charged with a crime.

Captain Morgan seemed somewhat skeptical. "Are you sure it wasn't a homicide?" he asked.

"I'm convinced it was an accident," Carlson said. Carlson's grasp of the facts of the case was substantially hampered because he had no inkling of what was said during certain conversations in Byfield's Tavern during the days leading up to the accident.

The first of these chats had taken place the previous Monday at the hour when the late afternoon regulars find their usual tables and barstools and let the cares of the workday dissolve in their cocktail glasses and beer bottles.

Al Boone was sitting alone in his favorite booth and having difficulty deciding between heading home and having another Budweiser. He looked up to see his friend Stan sitting across from him. Boone, swallowed up in his thoughts, had not seen him sit down.

"Don't wait for an invitation," Boone said. "Just make yourself at home."

"Hey," Stan said.

The two talked for a while about the impending Cubs-Dodgers series. Boone was a tall and muscular young man whose boyish good looks were tempered by his thrice-broken and hopelessly crooked nose. Stan was a short, thin fellow with a pale white face that contrasted harshly with his coal black hair. He was the opposite of handsome, yet his brown eyes flickered with intelligence, and he had a winning smile.

Stan was often in Byfield's, but Boone had never seen any of the friendly women who frequented the

place flirt with him. As he never ordered a drink, even the waitresses ignored Stan.

"I hate to say this, Boone," Stan was saying, "but I don't like the way you're drinking."

"Then buzz off," Boone said, with some heat. "I don't give a damn what you think, and I don't need you telling me what to do!"

"First of all," Stan answered, "maybe you could lower your voice. You've got people staring at us." Boone looked around and saw that this was true. He smiled and raised his glass to the onlookers who, reassured, returned to their own conversations.

"I have nothing against drinking," Stan said, "if you drink for the fun of it. But you're drinking as if you expect the beer to solve your problems."

"Well, that's because I can't see what to do," Boone said.

"Let me help, then."

"Okay," Boone said.

His answer was not as glib as it might at first seem. Boone knew Stan made his living as a consultant—a problem-solver or "trouble shooter," as he preferred to call it. Stan had explained to Boone how he helped people analyze the muddles they get themselves into, and then how he devised plans to get them out of their muddles. He also helped his clients get things they wanted but didn't know how to get.

"Most people are clueless when it comes to making a logical plan," Stan had said. He fixed his attention on Boone. "So, what's bugging you?"

"It's Karen. See, I wanted us to live together, but I still thought I could play around some—you know, on the sneak. The trouble is, when the ladies find out you're living with someone, they treat you like you're actually married to her. Word gets around, and all of the sudden, I'm off limits. It's boring."

"Why not just walk out?" Stan asked.

"It's not that simple. Karen had the bright idea that, instead of wasting money on rent, we should buy a condo together. You see the problem?"

"I see the problem," Stan said, "—and the solution. Look, there's a lawyer I know with an office near here. For twenty-five bucks, he'll make you out a will that gives your share of the condo to Karen when you become the late Al Boone."

"How does that help?" Boone asked.

"It's a chess game," Stan said. "One move at a time."

A few days later Boone dropped in at Byfield's hoping to find Stan there. Sure enough, he spotted his friend in the same old booth. Boone ordered a beer and sat down.

"Everything went just the way you predicted," he said. "Karen got all weepy, and told me she was sorry she had ever doubted me, and the next day she gave me a copy of her new will. When she croaks, I get everything she has including her half of the condo. So now what?"

"Listen carefully," Stan said.

"Tonight there's going to be an accident. You go out on your balcony with a stepladder and loosen the bulb in the ceiling light."

"How do you know..."

"Just listen," Stan said. "Get Karen out there and tell her you get this weird shooting pain in your arm when you reach up over your head, and ask her to change the bulb. When she gets up on the ladder, it's a simple matter to topple her over the railing. Six floors later, she's a stain on the concrete parking lot. Problem solved."

"Somebody would see me do it,"

Boone protested.

"Boone," Stan said shaking his head with impatience, "you loosen the light bulb, remember? It's dark on the balcony. *Dark!*"

✱ ✱ ✱

"How did you decide it was an accident?" Captain Morgan was asking.

"At first, it didn't seem likely," Lieutenant Carlson answered. "Especially when we learned that these two lovebirds had just made out wills leaving everything to each other. Karen's story

is that she was out on that balcony on a stepladder changing a light bulb when she happened to glance down and saw Boone rushing at her. She says she couldn't react fast enough, but in her shock her foot slipped and the ladder went flying and she landed on the deck. She says the boyfriend's momentum took him over the railing. Death by


accident. Karen's bruises and fractured wrist support her story.

"And another thing, Captain," Carlson continued, "Sergeant Zeller talked to some people at Byfield's Tavern, where Boone was a regular. They claim Boone had been acting crazy. They said he would sit for hours all alone in a booth, talking to himself. He'd argue

and laugh and get mad, and there was never anybody there but him."

"Maybe he was talking to a ghost," Morgan said.

"The way things turned out," Carlson said, "it's more likely he was talking to the devil."

Both men had a good laugh over that loony idea. 

## No Room for the Babe

by James G. Brien Jr.

Now fell lightly as Ed Dourr parked his car and walked several blocks through the suburban neighborhood shortly before midnight on Christmas Eve. A few homes were dark, but most were festive, festooned with lights in celebration of the season. Some inhabitants were asleep, others were at Midnight Mass. Dourr saw no signs of activity in any home; not a creature was stirring. Dourr walked purposefully and furtively, but not so furtively that he would have been unable to explain his presence if challenged. Under his jacket, he carried a large knife and a small hammer, both tucked into his belt in the small of his back.

Dourr stopped in the shadow of a small evergreen on the corner of two lots. One yard was dark. An illuminated ten-foot inflatable Santa, clad in red and white, with a black belt, waved a green mitten to beckon Dourr into the other yard. Dourr hesitated briefly, then crossed that yard, stooped down, and, grasping an orange extension cord, unplugged the floodlight that bathed Santa in a welcoming glow. Darkness engulfed the inflated Santa. Dourr quickly removed the knife from the small of his back. With his right hand, he steadied Santa. With his left, Dourr raised the knife, blade pointed down, above his head. Before he could plunge it into Santa, the holiday figure emitted an explosive hiss. Santa collapsed into a rubbery pile. "Damn," exclaimed Dourr.

A wiry man, clad in black from his shoes to his knit cap, glared at Dourr from the other side of the rubbery pile that had been Santa. Dropping the knife he had been holding, the man dashed at Dourr. Dourr tackled him,

and the two tumbled to the snow-covered grass. They rolled on the ground for several minutes, flailing at each other with fists flying. Dourr's knife fell to the ground early in the melee. Finally, Dourr, knees on his assailant's shoulders, pinned his opponent.

Dourr groped for his knife. Retrieving it, he held it to his attacker's throat. Except for the heaving of their chests, the two men remained motionless for almost a minute. "I'm going to get up and walk away," Dourr growled once he had got his breath. "Meanwhile, don't you move. You stay on the ground for five minutes, then you get up and go back in your house and forget this ever happened, okay?"

"What? You think I'm the homeowner defending his property?" barked Samuel Winthrop, still breathing heavily. "No. I'm here to destroy these statues."

"You too?" said Dourr, relaxing slightly, but still holding his knife at Winthrop's throat. "These displays offend reason. I'm amazed that anyone thinks Santa Claus flies around the world on one night putting toys down chimneys. Or that some god sent his son to be born as a man in some stable somewhere. These stories are fairy tales for people who can't think. I'm an atheist. I believe in reason and reason alone. I will destroy anything that offends reason."

Dourr removed his knife from Winthrop's throat and stood. He brushed the snow off his clothing.

"I destroy them because I am a Christian," rejoined Samuel Winthrop, standing. He picked up his knife, folded it, and shoved it into a pocket of his coat. He didn't bother to brush the snow from his clothing.

"A Christian?" sputtered the perplexed Dourr, tucking his knife into his belt.


"Christmas is a pagan winter solstice festival all dressed up to deceive people," growled Winthrop. "German heathens invented the Christmas tree. The Bible never says Christ was born on December 25. The Bible didn't tell us to celebrate His birthday, either. How could we? We don't know when it was. Our American forefathers banned the celebration of Christmas. And the Bible never says there were three kings, either. These are all Roman inventions. They're un-American Papist deceptions. What do you think the 'mas' in Christmas means, anyway?"

"A Christian, huh?" repeated the still-bewildered Dourr. He picked up the black-clad Christian's knit hat, which had been dislodged in their scuffle, brushed snow from it, and handed it to Winthrop. "I think I probably could work with you anyway," he mused.

"We must destroy these graven images," continued Winthrop, repositioning his cap. "We must reinstitute pure Christianity. These Papist practices must be destroyed. They're not biblical. They're un-Christian. They're un-American. They're an abomination of the Anti-Christ. They must be destroyed."

"Graven images, huh?" grunted Dourr, shrugging his shoulders. "If you say so," he muttered.

Ed Dourr reached under his jacket and removed the hammer from the small of his back. Dourr pointed the hammer at an illuminated plastic crèche covered by a thin blanket of snow in the next yard. "Will you join me?" he asked his former adversary. "I'm going to smash the infant next."

Samuel Winthrop hesitated only briefly. "May I borrow your hammer?" he inquired as the two men processed arm-in-arm to the adjoining yard. "I'd like to smash the mother too." 





## The Rule of Law

by David Beresford

"Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself?...So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist." —G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*

Twenty years ago I attended teachers' college after finishing an undergraduate degree in biology. One of our courses was *Teaching High School Biology*, in which we learned how to explain the DNA molecule, competition, survival of the fittest, carrying capacity, cell division, the usual biological stuff. Our professor was a kindly fellow, soft-spoken, who believed in a new emerging world order based on reason eliminating religious superstition—which we called the Age of Aquarius behind his back. This new world was going to come about through the invisible hand of self-interested competition. All human suffering would disappear due to self-interest producing co-operation. Then, in this happy time, everyone would share their goods for the benefit of all—a kind of secular monastic paradise on earth. He had invented a lab exercise based on role playing, and he was keen to have us learn this. The idea was that we would become agents of change, missionaries of co-operation in the classrooms of the nation.

The fellow had other odd ideas as well. He seemed to think that all rules were social constructs that caused people to become bad, so that society itself created criminals. In other words, he was a social Darwinian who never had to actually earn his living or face his own theories at work.

I had a tough time at teachers'

college back then. I was branded a dogmatist according to the questionnaire that I had to fill out in sociology class ("a simple test to see how open-minded you are," said our sociology prof); a religious zealot according to the questionnaire I completed in psychology class ("a simple test to see how superstitious you are," said our psychology prof). In geography, I was constantly arguing with the professor because I did not think that we were going to run out of oil in five years and use windmills and ocean currents to drive our cars—I was right, it turns out. Not much has changed since then, and we are subjected to a constant threat of climate change from our secular pulpits, a delightful hypothesis that is not falsifiable.

Our biology professor introduced his new game to us one day in class. We were assigned in groups to play the role of separate nations after being given a random allotment of resources drawn from a hat. Our group (the Blues) received two cards, one saying *Surplus Capital* and the other saying *The Ability to Extend Credit*, but no *Natural Resources*. Other groups had combinations of things such as *Large Populations of Labour*, or *Vast Reserves of Natural Resources* but with no *Surplus Capital* to develop them. The objective was to win, and you won if you produced a stable economy for your team. To do this we were to spend the next three hours visiting all the groups and make agreements with them. This would produce a kind of interconnected classroom economy in which everyone would benefit only if we all co-operated. It was more or

less cooked up so that any group that closed its borders would lose.

I, being a dogmatist, asked my professor what the rules of the game were.

"Rules? Why, there are no rules! That is what has caused all the trouble in the world already, the suffocating rules born of superstition! We are sweeping away the old way with its emphasis on rules. When you play this game, you will discover that we do not need any rules at all except Darwin's rule of survival of the fittest!" said my professor in rapturous glee.

We began the game. The members of our group scattered to find out what the other groups had, and then we gathered together for a little conference.

"How about this," I suggested. "First, he said no rules, so no rules. It is 9:54 a.m. right now. We divide up, and each of us approaches a different table. Then with a big smile we hold out our right hand and..."

This we did and, at exactly 10 o'clock, we struck. We grabbed all the resource cards from the top of the other groups' tables and then raced to the professor's desk, put the cards in his drawer and then linked arms around his desk.

The other groups were slow at first to grasp what had just happened; but when they did, they got it—and good. There was a yell, and a charge, and then we were all being shoved over tables and chairs. The other groups kept attacking but we held firm with linked arms. Lunch food and notebooks went flying at us through the air. Some students, not knowing what else to do, hid under their desks. Others just kept walking around saying it was unfair.

The professor at first was speechless. Then he yelled. Then he cried. His religion had abandoned him. His god had died.

I like to think that my professor had learned that some rules ought not to be taken down. But I cannot say for certain; he never spoke to me after that. ☞

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"What do you call the man who wants to embrace the chimney sweep?" "A saint," said Father Brown. —G.K. CHESTERTON



## An Author Accused

by Nancy Carpentier Brown

Our current culture holds the twin paradoxical views that racial diversity is gloriously wonderful, but racial descriptions of individuals are taboo. Celebrating diversity is good; describing diversity is bad. We should acknowledge that people are of different races and be glad, but not glad enough to wonder what those races are.

All people are to be celebrated as humans—well, most people: not those in the womb, those with severe and irreversible head injuries, those with mental competency issues, and the terminally old or ill, but I digress—not as the product of their racial heritage. Racial heritages and diversities can be celebrated, but only in the abstract—not as though any one individual actually is a member of a particular racial family. Racial diversity must be taken into consideration when taking standardized tests in school; racial descriptions must be hushed in the classroom.

A famous writer is accused of being anti-Semitic. A prominent figure in this author's book has a hooked nose, surely denoting a man of Jewish ancestry in a derogatory descriptive manner.

This character has greasy black hair: another sure sign of racial profiling.

This character is viewed in the book as the "bad guy." He has no wife or children, unmercifully picks on the students in his care, and continuously brings up the faults and failings of others, making himself superior.

He walks with arrogance; he punishes children for the perceived sins of their parents.

Surely this author is anti-Semitic for writing such a character description.

The reviewer who assumed that the hooked-nose character was Jewish, though, would not be accused of being judgmental. Instead, she would be praised as a whistle-blowing, political-correcting liberal goddess. She's likely to have written a best-selling non-fiction title, gone on a global book tour and have her own cable talk show by now. I'm generalizing, but that's how our culture treats such an exposé of perceived evil.

In researching anti-Semitism, I discovered a Web site that accused the Hebrew Scriptures (new-fangled language for the Old Testament) themselves of being anti-Semitic.

I think it fair to say that we seem to be overly sensitive to the possibility of people describing one nationality negatively. Do we have the same such concern over other nationalities?

Can an author of a work of fiction describe a Jewish character in any way or fashion that today will not be accused of being anti-Semitic? If a character happens to be Jewish, how is an author to describe such a character? Should he always be the loving, smiling father of a large and happy family, a joyful character who loves his work and everyone around him? A character who has no problems or worries, no cares in the world? Here is the beginning of a very dull story.

And let's talk about non-fiction. If my neighbor describes his experience of being treated poorly during a meal at the chi-chi French restaurant last night, is he now and forever more to be known as a francophobe?


When the local police blotter, as reported in the local paper, describes the burglar at the local pizza place as a black man, is this going too far?

Perhaps we should describe the situation without the use of nationality-revealing language. And then, we should not describe the color of the person's skin either. Maybe we shouldn't even say if the person is old or young, or even if they are a man or a woman. Each of these descriptions could be potentially viewed by someone as ageism, sexism, or nationalism.

The local police blotter may now politically correctly say, "A person appears to have stolen something from the local pizza parlor. If anyone has any information about the robber, please call 555-1234." We'll see how many calls come in.

Descriptions of people are necessary to the normal functioning of society. Being of French descent, I have noticed that no one cares if there are francophobes out there. I recently ate at a restaurant called "Froggies" which, surprisingly, turned out to be a French restaurant. Later that day, I was talking to my father. I told him about the restaurant, and he told me that "Froggie" used to be a derogatory term for people of French decent. I vowed never to eat there again. I will not be put down for being who I am at the same time I am eating. Is this supposed to be cute? *How dare they!*

To write about a person with a certain racial heritage cannot be construed as racial profiling or be used to prove the writer dislikes that race. Providing the race and description of the person merely is descriptive and informative, the things journalists and novelists are taught to do. Racial diversity matters because people matter. Racial background often means cultural differences, which is one of the things that make people interesting.

G.K. Chesterton was interested in all people. He wrote about a rich and diverse number of different kinds of people. And the author in question at the start of this column? No, not Chesterton. I was writing about *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling, who joins the illustrious list of prominent authors accused of being anti-Semitic. 

"I mean to keep those bullets for pessimists—pills for pale people."—G.K. CHESTERTON



# Changing the Culture in a Chestertonian Way

Part I: John Bellairs and Christian Children's Fiction

by Chris Chan

Every issue of *Gilbert Magazine* is filled with denunciations of the state of contemporary culture and the need to remedy these flaws. Indeed, much of today's popular entertainment promotes messages repugnant to most Chestertonians. That is why it is so important to recognize creative works that promote Chestertonian ideals, for a broader audience for these works will lead to a wider appreciation of these values.

This is the first in a series of essays on creative works that promote the Chestertonian ideal. The topic should be familiar to the readers of *Gilbert Magazine*. The moral content of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books has been debated dozens of times; the Christian overtones of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and C.S. Lewis's Narnia series have been mentioned frequently; and recently I reviewed Vere and Miesel's dissection of the atheistic agitprop in Phillip Pullman's fantasy (*GM* July-August, 2008—Ed.). But to the best of my knowledge, one major figure of Christian-themed supernatural literature has never been mentioned in this periodical.

John Bellairs, author of numerous fantasy novels, is a beloved yet underappreciated figure in late twentieth-century fiction. Although his work is geared for adolescents, like the best children's literature there are no age limits to his audience. Bellairs' work focuses on brave misfit adolescents paired with elderly friends, who use their knowledge of obscure historical minutiae and Catholic ritual to battle the forces of evil. Parents in search of suitable reading material for their older children ought to check out his novels.

Bellairs' corpus can be divided into four categories: his early work for adults, consisting of out-of-print Catholic humor and one Tolkien-inspired novel; the Lewis Barnavelt series, which focuses on the adventures of a boy wizard and his eccentric relatives; the Johnny Dixon novels; and the Anthony Monday books.

The Dixon and Monday books run along parallel themes: intergenerational friendships, the value of courage, the necessity of knowledge, the fact that a few ordinary people can be a powerful force for good given sufficient tenacity, and the power of Catholicism over diabolism.

Johnny Dixon is an undersized, bespectacled teenager who lives with his kindly grandparents, since his mother is deceased and his father is fighting in the Korean War. Life is fairly dull for Johnny until he meets the irascible, cantankerous Professor Childermass, a hot-tempered, elderly scholar whose passions include historical curiosities, frosting-smothered cakes, and disgusting cigarettes. Despite their radically dissimilar personalities, Johnny and the Professor become friends, and when paranormal events start occurring, the two team up to save their own lives and the world as well.

Anthony Monday is a gangly, socially awkward adolescent whose financially insecure parents often fail to understand their son's intellectual interests. Anthony's best friend is the prim yet feisty librarian Miss Ells, a spirited older woman who is just as happy to attack an officious socialite as she is willing to take on the forces of darkness that keep cropping up

around the local library.

Bellairs completed eight Dixon books and four Monday novels. Though all are good, the best of the Mondays are *The Treasure of Alpheus Winterborn*, a hunt for a priceless artifact and the only one of Bellairs' books to be devoid of the supernatural; and *The Dark Secret of Weatherend*, an adventure where Anthony and Miss Ells prevent apocalyptic climate change (caused by evil sorcery, not global warming). The black humor and colorful characters make it hard to pick favorites from the Dixons, but two unquestionable classics are *The Spell of the Sorcerer's Skull*, where Johnny, his friend Fergie, and the local parish priest Father Higgins try to rescue the vanished Professor and *The Trolley to Yesterday*, where the Professor travels through time in an attempt to prevent the sacking of Constantinople.

The spiritual themes of these books are integral to their plots, which are never preachy or feel as though the author is shoehorning a salutary lesson into an awkward place. There is a rather sly pattern running throughout Bellairs' work regarding the impotence of evil in the face of goodness. The moral of these books is that with piety, stubbornness, courage, intelligence, and well-directed righteous anger, the gates of hell shall never prevail.

Alas, Bellairs died far too young, passing away in 1991 at the age of fifty-three. Longtime fan Brad Strickland completed four unfinished books, and then wrote several original novels based on Bellairs' characters. From the one Strickland book that I've read, *The Drum, The Doll, and the Zombie*, Strickland does a fair job of imitating Bellairs' style, but the spiritual heart of the series is largely missing, and the characterizations aren't quite up to par. Another sad loss is the fact that new editions of Bellairs' books have jettisoned the illustrations by Edward Gorey that so perfectly captured the atmosphere of the stories.

Chestertonian parents ought to ensure that the works of John Bellairs have a prominent place on their children's reading lists. Their unique blend of horror, humor mystery, and catechesis is unparalleled in fiction. ☸



*"Do not look at the faces in the illustrated papers.  
Look at the faces in the street."* —G.K. CHESTERTON



## Running From Home

by Robert Moore-Jumonville

What can compare to running during Christmas season? Crisp air, a fierce and clean world, and hope reverberating in human hearts—what could be better? After all, when running at Christmas, we not only experience the adventures of flying out into the cold winter world, but also the warmth and joy of returning safely home again. In G.K. Chesterton's words, we realize "all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again."

Yet so many people today seem set on merely running out from their homes without the thought of ever returning—people scrambling at gas pumps, darting into restaurants, sprinting for a sale, diving across aisles at the grocery—as though the only way to crown humanity with meaning were through conquest abroad. "Just before the great festival of the home," Chesterton cautions, "the whole population seems to have become homeless."

While in town the other day, I thought maybe I had missed the headlines announcing a new, localized Winter Olympic event. Perhaps the Federal Government was promising greater price reductions for the few hearty survivors of a gladiatorial contest designed to stimulate the economy. "The Christmas season is domestic," chimed Chesterton, "and for that reason most people now prepare for it by struggling in tramcars, standing in queues, rushing away in trains, crowding despairingly into tea shops, and wondering when or whether they will ever get home." Why is that? At the local strip mall the other day, I asked one poor soul who looked rather

weathered and beaten if I could help her get home. She screeched, wild-eyed, "I've forgotten where home is."

What is it, I wonder, that we are all so desperately running from, and why does our flight seem to quicken pace during Advent and Christmas? Why all the frantic bustling about? Why so uncomfortable with sitting still? I'm reminded of a friend who seems addicted to activity—any and every activity—as though missing an event or experience would spell tragedy for her and her children.

Perhaps human longing intensifies for many of us during the Yuletide holidays, from faint echoes of failed childhood dreams and desires. What was it I wanted that year so distant in my memory now—was it the magical experience I was hoping for: the perfect tree; the scent of evergreen mingled with a whiff of fresh pecan pie; the two-foot-deep snow storm that turned the wide world white? Was it really only a fire truck that kept my mind racing late into the night, or did I just want everyone in the family near the fire, with a spirit of magnanimous calm surrounding us all?

Whatever the source of our discontent, it takes a terrible toll during Christmas. Observing this spiritual malady in his generation, as people frantically grasped for meaning, Chesterton wondered aloud, "I do not know whether some of them disappear for ever in the toy department or simply lie down and die in the tea rooms; but by the look of them, it is quite likely."

Contrast this centrifugal longing that pushes outward with the Christmas story that calls us home. In *The Everlasting Man*, Chesterton argued that no other tale of divine birth could


compete with the Christmas narrative: "the truth is that there is a quite peculiar and individual character about the hold of this story on human nature." He goes on to insist, however, that it is not the story's outward thrust that attracts us. "It does not exactly work outwards, adventurously, to the wonders to be found at the ends of the earth." It is not through activity, or busyness, or aesthetics, in other words, that Christmas entices us—not even through the activity of healthy running. "It is rather something that surprises us from behind, from the hidden and personal part of our being...It is rather as if a man had found an inner room in the very heart of his own house, which he had never suspected; and seen a light from within." Christmas, if it is ever really found, is thus found by returning home quietly. The shepherds did not have to run abroad to hear the good news. Angels appeared to them in their own region. Instead, it was the wise men who had to search far and wide to teach us how near to us the Christ child lay:

Step softly, under snow or rain,  
To find the place where men can  
pray,  
The way is all so very plain  
That we may lose the way.

Go humbly; humble are the skies,  
And low and large and fierce the Star,  
So very near the manger lies  
That we may travel far.

Hark! Laughter like a lion wakes  
To roar to the resounding plain,  
And the whole heaven shouts and  
shakes  
For God Himself is born again.

And we are little children walking  
Through the snow and rain.

Don't get me wrong. Running out from our homes during Christmas—through snow and rain, traveling far—may actually help exorcise our spiritual jitters. Perhaps in our sedentary culture it takes a bit of running to bring us to the point where we can stop and peer into "the inner room in the very heart of [our] own house," and there discover a light from within, nearer than we ever dreamed. 

*"It is true that I am of an older fashion; much that I love has been destroyed or sent into exile."* —G.K. CHESTERTON



## Frank Brangwyn and The Daughters of Jerusalem

by G.K. Chesterton

**B**rangwyn comes out of the great Flemish tradition; and is full of that peculiar fullness, something that might be called a Christian exuberance, which piled itself up to overflowing in the free cities of the Catholic Netherlands. There is something more medieval in the tradition of expressing vitality, and even exuberance, by the vast variety of ugliness; and even the ugliness of the crowd. Now these pictures are packed with exactly that sort of Flemish vitality and variety. Every face is different; and every face

is vigorous, with an ugly energy that is more attractive than vulgar beauty. It is important to emphasise this crowded and tumultuous background of all the pictures, especially in connection with the grotesque distinction in every face and gesture, because it leads up to the point of the most decisive distinction of all. It would be possible to write a page about every face in that crowd. A face peering out of some dim corner is often in the exact sense surprising; to some it will often be puzzling. For though these masks of the mob are often extravagant

in type, they are always subtle in intention. The mob is not a mob, in the sense of men merely turned into a man, still less into a beast. There is every shade of every passion, or lack of passion, that may go to make up a huge human blunder or crime; as if to emphasise the deeper doctrinal conception that every man has his own quarrel with God.

Many people must have speculated on the possibility of expressing some special facet of the many-faced mystery of a divine humanity, under the symbol of a new version of the bodily presence of Our Lord. Brangwyn has stressed the isolation of Christ; the keen and sensitive spirit passing through the coarseness and carelessness of mankind. But it is keen as well as sensitive; and it is here perhaps that we touch on something, if not of the intention, at least of the impression, or the effect. We have the sense of something that cleaves its way like an arrow; that cuts through the crowd like a knife; even when disarmed and defeated, something that brought a sword into the world.

There is one scene especially in which this imaginative impression is to me so extraordinarily vivid, that I will venture to attempt a fuller description of it; all the more since I know that in this case the point may not be obvious or may even be repellent.

Brangwyn has stuck grimly in the main to the grim old tradition of exhaustion and defeat. He almost exaggerates, if anybody could exaggerate, the paradox of the impotence of omnipotence and the hopelessness of the hope of the world. Christ appears again and again prone as a felled tree or a fallen pillar, faceless in that His face is already turned away to nothingness and night. And yet it all works up, as it seems to me, to one central design in which Christ lifts His head, looks sharply over His shoulder, and his eyes shine with defiance and almost with fury. And that one flash of fierceness is shot back at the Women of Jerusalem weeping over Him.

I doubt whether everybody will like it; I am not sure that I like it. But I am quite sure it is the most powerful scene in a powerful series; and that there are many thousand more things in it than meet the eye; either my eye or anybody else's. Since this is the sharpest relief and revelation of that pointed profile,



Frank Brangwyn, *The Daughters of Jerusalem* (1935)




against the multifarious faces of the mob, it will seem to many to show only that sharpness of the Semitic edge, of which I have written already. I can imagine people saying that it looks like Shylock throwing a curse over his shoulder as he leaves the court. Well, there is a dark inverted truth even there; there is that double contrasted aspect, of light and darkness, in the same sensitive spirit of Israel. But in the highest example there is always this high paradox; that He has prayed for his foes, but is protesting against His friends. Jesus is not in the least like Shylock; but there is some symbolic parallel between Jesus and Job. It is not recorded, I think, that Job went out of his way to curse the robbers who had raided his flocks and herds; he could endure everyone except his comforters. But in the higher example—in the highest example—there is a riddle to be solved by a principle much more profound; and depending indeed upon that central mystery of the human and the divine united, which is the tremendous theme of the whole. The theme of the Greek tragedy is the division between God and Man; the theme of the Gospel tragedy is the union of God and Man; and its immediate effects are more tragic.

The figures of the weeping women will also puzzle the spectator; or, at any rate, the superficial spectator. It is here, I think, that the peculiar value of that variety of portraiture, with which the pencil of the artist has played upon the many-faced mob, has produced some of its most delicate and original effects. For they are a rather curious group of mourners, these mothers and maidens of the holy city. I do not mean that many of them, or even most of them, are not perfectly sincere in their pity for an unfortunate prisoner going to punishment. But I do mean that there are singular shades and degrees, even in that sincerity, and that in some cases it is curiously mixed with curiosity, and in some even sinks into vulgarity. One elderly woman (characteristically) in the background, is realistically torn to the heart. She is only a face half thrust out of the shadow, into which the more energetic have elbowed her; but I feel that I know all about her; she is almost exactly like a Margate landlady with a heart of gold—which is broken. One

younger woman is quaintly sentimental; she has an eye off, with some suggestion of a tear in the corner of it; but I cannot help feeling that she was wondering whether they will show the Crucifixion on the Pictures. Another woman is an utterly stolid and probably sensible mother, laden with trailing children; doing her duty in a dazed way; but I rather suspect it is chiefly the duty of taking the children to the show. Behind, and a little apart, a few strokes indicate a woman who is also a lady; but I am not sure whether she is tragic or only dignified. And as I looked at this confusing crowd, I suddenly had a collective impression about them, whether it was the impression intended or no. All these people are looking at a man who is going to be hanged. Most of them are really sorry for him because he is down and out; none of them has the slightest doubt that he is entirely down and out. They have read all about it in the Sunday papers; and the Home Secretary would not interfere. They not only could not conceive of there being any hope for him; still less could they conceive of there being any case for him. But they are sane and cannot deny that it is sad that he should die and disappear, when their own daily lives will go on in security and even prosperity. And it is upon them that the victim turns back, in sudden and burning anger, the face of an eagle.

...and this is the last portent of the darkness; that you are sorry for me. That part of me in which you never believed, the madman's dream of deity—you need waste no tears upon that. But that part of me that is part of you; that ancient and achieved thing in which you do believe, that tradition that was mine as well as yours; the Blood; the Household; the Great Story—if you are wanting something to weep for! Because I was born Man, I was born patriot; of a place and of a people; and if you would compassionate me for anything, compassionate me for that; for the Tables and the Temple and Solomon in all his glory. Do you imagine that a dream has come to an end; if you knew what reality has come to an end! If you knew the real tragedy that shall trail after you across the world, century after century; the wrongs you do, the wrongs you suffer, the endless wrangle about wrongs. And you who stand on

the very crest of the stooping wave of this awful and pitiable catastrophe—you do not even know what to pity.

I cannot exaggerate my sense of the vivid inspiration of the artist who made that last look backwards as fierce as a flash of lightning. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me; but weep for yourselves and for your children." 

From "The Way Of The Cross" (1935)

## IF VI

- If you live only on newspapers, you will never guess what will happen next. (*The Listener*, Feb. 6, 1935)
- If there is an intellectual war there must be intellectual armies. (*Illustrated London News*, Dec. 17, 1910)
- "If you have a theory about man and if you can only prove it by talking about Plato or George Washington, your theory may be a quite frivolous thing. But if you can prove it by talking about the butler or the postman, then it is serious because it is universal." (*"The Innocence of the Criminal," Fancies vs. Fads*)
- If marriage had not existed, it would have been necessary for artists to invent it. If ever monogamy is abandoned in practice, it will linger in legend and in literature. (*Illustrated London News*, July 15, 1922)
- If the policeman regulates drinking, why should he not regulate smoking, and then sleeping, and then speaking, and then breathing? (*Illustrated London News*, June 5, 1920)
- If you make an idol of a stone, you seldom make a statue of it. (*Illustrated London News*, March 4, 1916)
- If a European peasant, who knows enough about nature and practical science to make a desert blossom like the rose, happens not to have learned longhand, as I have not learned shorthand, he is refused entrance at many modern portals in favor of the nearest forger. (*Illustrated London News*, July 1, 1916)
- If we boast of our best, we must repent of our worst. (*"Paying for Patriotism," The Common Man*)



*"The more truly we can see life as a fairytale, the more clearly the tale resolves itself into war with the Dragon who is wasting fairyland."* —G.K. CHESTERTON



## "Those People"

by Kyro R. Lantsberger

**T**hose People" are always to blame. Be it a financial failure, an athletic catastrophe, or a bad meal at a restaurant, Those People are always to blame. Those People could be immigrants, witches or, as the darker side of Western history shows, Those People could be the Jews.

Anti-Semitism is truly a blight on the moral conscience of the human race. Inadvertent remarks in this area by celebrities have all but ended careers, and nations suffer ostracism and second-class status among for adopting policies which either subtly or blatantly embrace this strain of hate and prejudice. This millennia-old burden on the People of Israel has been labeled as boorish, crude, indicative of poor culture, and even poorer taste. It is the Holocaust that opened the eyes of mankind to the ghastly results of inner hatreds and fears projected onto a group. Just as a sunrise casts away the darkness, however, it also creates shadows. It is within these shadows that the anti-phoenix of anti-Semitism has hidden from the ashes of the Holocaust.

At the very root of anti-Semitism are the propositions that a group can be held responsible for the actions of individuals, and that this culpability is transferable. Irony is often at the heart of tragedy. The two foundations of this cultural cancer are also ideas anathema to the classical traditions of occidental thought and philosophy. These roots, which in the past blossomed into the dark flower of anti-Semitism, have found new fertile

ground in which to bring forth seductive fruit.

True evil never wears a red suit with horns and cloven hooves. Ideas bound for hell seldom trail a forked tail in warning. Yet the base ideas that erupted against the Jews now form the basis of much of what constitutes contemporary intellectual life. Turn the pages of a newsmagazine and it is increasingly apparent that newsmakers are becoming less and less prevalent, and that the real driving forces behind events are inanimate forces. Demographics and market trends are responsible for financial worries. Social economics from macro to micro are discussed in terms of race, educational attainment, and income bracket. This disassociation of real events from real actions by real people forges the chain that eventually binds the culpability of individuals to the collective guilt of an entire group. Smokers, soldiers, SUV owners, and numerous others are beginning to stifle under the blanket of blame that shifts responsibility for the world's problems onto the latest out-grouped organization.

It must be said that there is value in the methods and results of social research and actuarial sciences in their proper place. Unfortunately, there is now a tendency for the face of good and evil to melt back into just another visage in the crowd. It is that gray anonymity that turns a person into one of "Those People." A repeat of the Jewish experience occurs every time a societal ill is laid onto one of "Those People." The vehicle may have changed, but the engines which

created the blanket hatred and distrust of Jewish identity still throttle the human heart.

Hatred against the Jews, pogroms, and forced exiles show the worst of the history of Europe and the Near East. Although now a major *faux pas*, the intellectual and moral temptations to seek scapegoat groups for the ills of life still exist. This spiritual malaise cannot be defeated by wrapping it in the garb of multiculturalism or sensitivity training—these are offshoots of the same tree as the problem. Personal change, wrapped in sackcloth, and penetrating self examination of conscience is the true redemption of the inner man and the only way salvation is offered to Jew and Gentile alike. ☸

### CHESTERTON IS EVERYWHERE

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2008

#### HOW TO BE KILLER AT COCKTAIL PARTIES by Firoozeh Dumas

[excerpt] Just saying this author's name—G.K. Chesterton—will make you look debonair, like someone who knows his way around a silk ascot.

Chesterton's best-known novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is a metaphysical thriller full of quotable lines sure to make you look mighty witty. A lull in the conversation? Just throw in this line, which will fit any topic from politics to religion: "Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property so that they may more perfectly respect it." You need not say anything else the entire evening.

National Public Radio: *All Things Considered* (<http://www.npr.org:80/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97102045>)



*"It is true that I am of an older fashion; much that I love has been destroyed or sent into exile." —G.K. CHESTERTON*



## A Shrine out of Time

by David W. Fagerberg

I took what seemed to be a step out of time last week, but in a jumbled sort of way like a dream produces when it gathers images from disjointed places and times. It seemed I was in an Italian hill town in the Middle Ages, for I saw a pilgrimage winding up through a green, wooded hillside to a Romanesque dome and a bell tower jutting out of the forest. It was a shrine to Our Lady and this was the day of its dedication. Leading the procession were acolytes carrying torches and a processional cross before a relic container borne on the shoulders of four. There were Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulcher, a twelfth-century order, in their beret hats and shimmering black capes; color was added by knights in feathery regalia. I counted about twenty bishops; color was added by two cardinals in red. The shrine's outer walls were fieldstone and limestone blocks, and a burnt orange slate roof below a copper dome; inside marble and gold, capital ornamentation, and stained-glass windows that depicted the life of the Blessed Mother.

Then it was as if I were transported to a different place and time. On the wall behind the altar, in its honored place, was a painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who had appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531. In the courtyard outside the main door of the shrine stood a bronze statue of Xocoyte, as the Blessed Mother called Diego when she spoke to him in his native tongue at the apparition. It depicted the moment when he showed Bishop Juan de Zumárraga his cloak upon which an icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe had been miraculously impressed, and from which cascaded

roses in December. The relics that were being translated were those of Blessed Miguel Pro, a native of Guadalupe, a Jesuit priest who was executed by a Mexican firing squad in 1927.

And I myself arrived at the Pilgrim Center on a large yellow school bus from the shrine's overflow parking lot C. We were just south of Lacrosse, Wisconsin ([www.guadalupe Shrine.org](http://www.guadalupe Shrine.org)), yet crisscrossing before my eyes was twelfth-century Italy, fifteenth-century Mexico, and my own American century; gathered together were princes of the Church and lay pilgrims, Hispanics and whites, men and women. And I thought of only one person who could bring these spaces, times, and cultures together like that. Our Lady had summoned the tryst.

G.K. Chesterton writes of the difficulty some believers have with Mary, and the even greater difficulty any believer has without Mary. "When I was a boy a more Puritan generation objected to a statue upon my parish church representing the Virgin and Child. After much controversy, they compromised by taking away the Child." He found this odd, as if to wonder how that would satisfy those who worried about Mariolatry. But the attempt turned out to be a parable, he says.

You cannot chip away the statue of a mother from all round that of a new-born child. You cannot suspend the new-born child in mid-air; indeed you cannot really have a statue of a new-born child at all. Similarly, you cannot suspend the idea of a new-born child in the void or think of him without thinking of his mother. You cannot visit the child without visiting the mother.

And so various shrines for visiting are put up, even in the woods of Wisconsin. "We must admit, if only as we admit it in an old picture, that those holy heads are too near together for the haloes not to mingle and cross."

Some members of that Puritan generation were also present in the dreamy landscape I have been describing. Our bus from parking lot C had to drive past a small group of protestors—I cannot think of another word for the group standing at the entrance to the parking lot holding signs of warning and complaint. I could not make out the smaller print of signs decrying the Rosary with quotations from the very book from which the Rosary comes. Or the scattered Bible verses that would strip Christ out of the communion of saints, as Chesterton's neighbors chipped Christ out of the arms of his mother. Why is there more honor in isolating Christ than finding him at the head of his body? But one placard was writ large enough for me to catch despite my startled mind. It read, "This is a pagan goddess."

I should have dismounted the bus and asked the carrier whether he meant Mary herself, or whether he meant the Lady of Guadalupe. I should have enlisted the aid of the ACLU in politically and correctly pointing out that the latter maligns the indigenous citizens of North America. I suspect it would have been easier to rally support for Hispanic culture than for Catholic culture, but neither think Mary is a goddess. I should have, as Evan MacLan did to Mr. Turnbull in *The Ball and the Cross*, challenged someone to a duel for insulting the honor of Our Lady. But, as both MacLan and Turnbull discovered, this is frowned upon in a society that does not care what you believe so long as you believe it fiercely and privately. Besides, a dreamy and preoccupied state had been cast upon me by my time travel, and I was anxious to begin my ascent up that holy Wisconsin hill. ☸

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[www.chesterton.org](http://www.chesterton.org)

"The mystery of life is the plainest part of it." —G.K. CHESTERTON



## The Copy

by John Peterson

**N**ed and his nephew Louie were staying at a Florida resort, taking some much-needed time off; and on this sunny morning, they could be seen enjoying breakfast at poolside.

"Why don't we steal this?" Louie asked, handing the other man a newspaper. Uncle Ned studied the picture, which showed a somewhat dumpy and overdressed society dowager named Coblin, who was wearing a heavily jeweled necklace.

"You want to steal the Burmese Loop?" Ned asked. "How about the Hope diamond while you're at it?"

"I don't think anybody wears the Hope diamond to a charity benefit," Louie said. "Look, it was right there for the taking."

"No, my boy, it wasn't," Ned replied. "The necklace in your news photo is a copy. The original is no doubt under serious lock and key and far removed from the sticky fingers of jewel thieves."

"But why have a famous necklace if you can't wear it?" Louie asked. And so his uncle explained that the late Mr. Coblin had purchased the renowned splash of jewelry from Sotheby's with great fanfare. Since everyone accepts the fact that Mrs. Coblin owns the original, it doesn't matter that she wears a copy in public. There is no need for extra insurance, bodyguards, or additional security measures, and yet Mrs. Coblin enjoys the snob value of showing the thing off. That, after all, is the whole idea.

"And besides," Uncle Ned concluded, "never steal something famous.

You get twice the publicity, twice the police investigation, and it's twice as long before they take the heat off."

"Okay, fine," Louie said, ticking three points off on his fingers. "One, locate the original; two, take possession; and, three, arrange things so the theft is not reported."

Ned shook his head in amusement. "Be my guest," he said.

"You'll buy the champagne?"

"Certainly, my boy," said Ned. "Gladly."

✱ ✱ ✱

Louie was a likable young man and people enjoyed chatting with him. Thus, when he walked up to a certain table in a popular local bar, he had already gathered a large store of

information about Mrs. Coblin, her mansion, and her household staff. He knew that, like many who are wealthy but not schooled in the ways of wealth, Mrs. Coblin was despised by her employees.

"Hi," Louie said, smiling brightly, "are you here year around?" The middle-aged man, whose name was

Morton, confessed he was a lifelong resident. "Let me buy you a drink," said Louie amiably, "and ask you a few questions about the local scene." It would be his pleasure, the man admitted.

The two exchanged pleasantries. Morton said that he worked as head steward in the mansion of a wealthy widow. "What do you do for a living, Louie?" he asked.

"I'm a professional jewel thief," Louie said.

Three weeks later, Mrs. Coblin was one extremely angry woman. Morton, her head steward, had walked off the job without giving any reason or even any notice. Just walked off the job. And for another thing, a thief had opened the door of her limo, wrenched the necklace from around her neck, and fled. Now she had the bother and expense of having another copy made. The thief, she supposed, was just opening limo doors at random, hoping for a purse or a gold watch. Well, she thought with bitter satisfaction, he'll have a nasty surprise when some pawn broker or fence tells him he has just stolen the world's most famous collection of worthless paste.

A servant announced Mrs. Coblin's new personal jeweler and gemologist, a Mr. DeNova, and brought the gentleman into the sitting room. "Your predecessor," Mrs. Coblin said, "did quite acceptable work, and I expect no less from you. Here is the Burmese Loop.

### WHODUNIT THEOLOGY:

#### FATHER BROWN ON CAPITALISM...

"Communism is a heresy; but it isn't a heresy that you people take for granted. It is Capitalism you take for granted; or rather the vices of Capitalism disguised as a dead Darwinism. Do you recall what you were all saying in the Common Room, about life being only a scramble, and nature demanding the survival of the fittest, and how it doesn't matter whether the poor are paid justly or not? Why, that is the heresy that you have grown accustomed to, my friends; and it's every bit as much a heresy as Communism. That's the anti-Christian morality or immorality that you take quite naturally. And that's the immorality that has made a man a murderer today."





How much time do you require for taking measurements and photographs?"

The jeweler inspected the necklace briefly. "Dear Lady," he protested, "I was hoping to work from the original."

"From the..." Mrs. Coblin stopped herself. She might be a mean-spirited old bag, but she was far from stupid. She sized up the situation with remarkable speed. If the necklace there on the table were not the original, then there must have been a switch. That would mean she had been wearing the original in the limousine, and that is what the thief had carried off. By now, the individual gems would be making their way through whatever system thieves use to sell their loot. The Burmese Loop no longer existed.

But Mrs. Coblin also realized that, so long as no one knew the original had been stolen and broken up, a copy would have every bit as much snob

appeal as it had before. She took a deep breath and made a decision. "You will make an exact copy of this copy, Mr. DeNova," she said, firmly. "The location of the original is a closely held family secret."

The jeweler nodded, and opened his valise. From this, he extracted an expensive-looking camera and various measuring tools. Mrs. Coblin cursed her head steward. She could not imagine how the man had brought off the switcheroo. The damned sneak, she thought bitterly, he fooled me completely. He wouldn't be coming back, obviously, so she made a mental note to see the agency about getting him replaced.

As she amused herself with useless thoughts of revenge coupled with daydreams of what might have been, she did not see Mr. DeNova calmly take a necklace from his valise. It was the copy of the Burmese Loop that

young Louie had so unceremoniously snatched from her in the limo. Mr. DeNova picked up the priceless original and placed the copy in its place on the folds of the black velvet fabric on the table. The original went into his valise.

Mr. DeNova continued taking measurements. He had every intention of creating a new copy of the necklace for Mrs. Coblin according to the commission she had given him; but he expected a much bigger payday for doing nothing more than taking her Burmese Loop from the table when she wasn't looking. Five seconds' work. Of course Morton, her head steward, would get his share for doing nothing more risky than walking away from his job. Very clever people, these jewel thieves, he thought. He was looking forward eagerly to joining his new friends later that evening for that long-promised champagne toast. ☞

## The Chesterton Files

The Dennis Tryon Casebook by Steve Miller

### The Sword of Wood

**Dennis Tryon**, a local schoolmaster, is locking up when a parson's daughter, Dorothy Hood, warns him that an unbeatable swordsman is threatening him.

**The Mystery.** How can a schoolmaster with a wooden cane fight a man who defeated the seven best fencers in the area?

**Subplot.** Can true love spring up between a schoolmaster and a parson's daughter?

**Other Characters.** Sir Guy Griffin, local squire, former Royalist general and reported to be the greatest swordsman of the county; Jeremy Blunt, one of Tryon's pupils who plays with a wooden sword; Humphrey Griffin, the eldest son of Sir Guy; Geoffrey Griffin, another son; Miles Griffin, the youngest son; three unnamed sons; Sir Godfrey Skene, the mysterious sword wielder; and a mob of local inhabitants suspecting witchcraft.

**Location.** The village of Grayling-Abbot, Somerset. The time is the

Restoration in the reign of Charles II (1660-1685).

**Publishing History.** "The Sword of Wood" was first published in *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1913. Like other uncollected G.K. Chesterton stories it is found in Volume XIV of the *Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, published by Ignatius Press.

**Notable Allusions.** (1) To Chesterton the story is set in the time when Merry England of medieval times was being supplanted by what later men have come to call the Modern Age. The tactics of Sir Godfrey Skene and the flippant styles of the London he represents show this is not a change for the better. This is one of Chesterton's answers to the myth of progress. Is Skene progress? Should we return to the medieval values of Sir Guy Griffin? Alas, even the last monarch to love Merry England, Charles II, knows it is vanishing and perhaps connives at its demise. (2) Swimming the witch was an old test for the supernatural. It

continued in some parts of England into the twentieth century. The suspect was tied securely and thrown into a body of water. The pure water rejects a witch and the guilty suspect floats. Nooses and fires were available to deal with one so convicted. An innocent person sinks and hopefully is retrieved before too long an immersion. Depending on whether one is the swimmer or the mob, this is either a no-win or no-lose scenario. After all, witch suspects were seldom the most popular members of the community. (3) The Royal Society, which included Sir Isaac Newton among others, was in its early stages at this time. Sir Godfrey's wonderful sword seems an appropriate contribution to the new scientific age the Society fostered.

**The Opening.** "Down in the little village of Grayling-Abbot, in Somerset, men did not know that the world we live in had begun. They did not know that all we have come to call 'modern' had silently entered England, and changed the air of it. Well they did not know it very clearly even in London; though one or two shrewd men like my Lord Clarendon, and perhaps Prince Rupert, with his chemicals and his sad eyes, may have had a glimmer of it." ☞

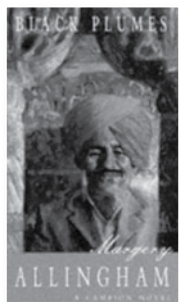
# Chesterton's Bloodthirsty Heirs

"I should enjoy nothing more than always writing detective stories, except always reading them."—G.K. Chesterton

Brief Reviews of the Contemporary Mystery Scene by Steve Miller

**Margery Allingham.** *Black Plumes* (1940). In the Golden Age of Mystery the character was everything. Doubts about who a character really was and whether he was capable of murder was the mystery. Does a seemingly flippant artist mask a murderous passion for vengeance? Does an ancient matriarch possess the power to exterminate threats to her absent son's business? Can the story's young heroine survive if either her fiancé or grandmother is a killer? Margery Allingham adds a pair of victims who deserve their fates, an explorer returned from the dead, his nervily hysterical wife, suitably eccentric servants and Inspector Bridie from the far isles of Scotland whose peculiar speech only thinly screens a ruthless mind. Allingham lays out the ambiguous clues and false trails of a good mystery with the deft touch of a true mistress of the genre. But it is her ability to make us care about fictional lives and see them as real no matter how unreal the circumstances of the story that place her in the exalted company of Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh—the grand dames of mystery writing of the 1930s through 1950s. In Allingham's tales, human relationships are not plot devices but the story. The crime matters because it affects people. In *Black Plumes* the crowds gathering outside the murder scene are the voice of public justice. Like a Greek chorus, they announce that murder is evil and perpetrators must pay a price in blood.

**Elizabeth Peters.** *The Laughter of Dead Kings* (2008). Vicki Bliss has a complicated life. She is blond, six feet tall and built like a Playboy bunny. This can cause credibility issues working for a Munich museum. Her boss Schmidt is an apparent buffoon who knows everyone in the museum world and



claims to be the greatest swordsman in Europe.

Her boyfriend, John Tregarth, is an allegedly reformed antiquities thief trying to support a run-down family estate from a less-than-flourishing antique shop. (His mother disdains Vicki.) An appeal from another allegedly former crook now working for the Egyptian government raises the unpleasant suspicion that John may have recently stolen the body of King Tut.



Vicki and John's bone search takes them to Italy, Germany and Egypt. They encounter gun-toting villains and with Schmidt join a Berlin demonstration to return Queen Nefertiti's bust to her homeland. In Egypt, the tale becomes more somber with the murders of a witness to the theft of Tut and a female accomplice trying to double-cross the gang. There is a final showdown in the criminals' lair complete with a swordfight. Vicki Bliss appears in five other Peters' books, although overshadowed by the author's main heroine Egyptologist Amelia Peabody Emerson. As an extra treat Peters, as herself, makes a cameo appearance. Appropriately we learn Schmidt is already her fan and has even obtained her autograph. ☸

## IN PRAISE OF PHRASES

"Half our speech consists of similes that remind us of no similarity; pictorial phrases that call up no picture; of historical allusions the origin of which we have forgotten." —G.K. Chesterton

### "Shoot the Moon."

Albert Richard Smith (1816–1860)

As the moon is unreachable, or at least it was before the age of space exploration, we say something impossible "is like asking for the moon." To "shoot the moon" in certain games of cards or dominos, means trying to realize an extremely difficult outcome—like taking every trick in a hand during a game of Hearts. This use of "Shoot the moon" seems to be a combination of "Shoot the works" and "Go for the moon."

The literary debut of this strange phrase traces back to author Smith's first book, *The Adventures of Mr. Ledbury* (1842). In those days, its meaning was "to sneak one's possessions out of a rooming house in the dead of night to avoid having them seized by the landlord for unpaid rent." G.K. Chesterton admired the phrase, and in *Alarms and Discursions* (1902) he praised it as an excellent example of the strength and creativity of popular slang:

What concentrated irony and imagination there is, for instance, in the metaphor which describes a man doing a midnight flitting as "shooting the moon"? It expresses everything about the runaway: his eccentric occupation, his improbable explanations, his furtive air as of a hunter, his constant glances at the blank clock in the sky.

Stranger yet, according to an 1809 dictionary of slang, the phrase had earlier been "to shove the moon" with the same fly-by-night connotations.

Perhaps the relationship between the two meanings is that the roomer attempting to remove all his furniture without being caught by the landlord is similar to the player shooting the moon in a game of Hearts who wants to take every trick without being foiled by the other players.

# Love and Loyalty

by Joe Campbell

**O**n my way to the interview, I felt as though I were inside a paradox. The sun had just appeared above the horizon, as in autumn the earth sets late where I live. Busloads of children headed for school to unlearn what they'd been taught at home. A fashionable clothing store opened its doors to a posse of waiting women, all undressed to the nines. Several dogs were out walking their people.

My editor had assigned me to interview a visiting historian who said he possessed information about G.K. Chesterton that would shake the literary establishment. Since Chesterton is one of my favorite authors, I was eager to break the story.

"He was pro-Semitic," the historian told me.

I was taken aback. I knew that during the South African War, Chesterton was pro-Boer, but I put it down to youthful indiscretion. Oh, yes, and I was familiar with rumors that he was pro-Irish and pro-Polish. But to be pro-Semitic as well? This suggested a worrying pattern of divided loyalties.

"He was pro-English," I insisted, when I had recovered sufficiently to speak. "Do you accuse him of infidelity?"

"There's no doubt in my mind," he said, "that Chesterton practiced free patriot love."

"He was committed to England, where he was born and bred," I protested. "Why, even his traditional apparel proclaimed it, the capes, the swordsticks—"

"Precisely my point," he replied. "He wanted all peoples, including Jews in England, to proclaim their national commitment by returning to traditional dress."

"But the Jews had no nation," I reminded him.

"He wanted them to have one. He believed that they deserved it as

much as anyone else. He advocated the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East, their traditional homeland."

"He wanted powerful cosmopolitan Jews out of England," I asserted.

"Because they were powerful and cosmopolitan," he said, "not because they were Jews."

While I ruminated over the distinction, he added with a flourish, "Chesterton opted for local loyalty over cosmopolitan detachment."

"The very thing I've been saying," I replied, convinced that I'd caught him out. "His opting for local loyalty meant that he was pro-English. But to concede that and accuse him of free patriot love is contradictory."

"Not contradictory," he said. "Paradoxical. Loving his own homeland, he understood how others loved theirs and he loved them for it."

"Are you saying that because he was pro-English, he was also pro-Boer, pro-Irish, pro-Polish, pro-Semitic and so on?"

"Exactly, but he was loyal to England alone."

I said I had difficulty believing he could be pro-Semitic given the culture he grew up in and the literature he loved.

"Some of his best friends were Jews," he protested.

"Spare me that old canard."

"Even as a youth, he was pro-Semitic," he said. "The debating society he and E.C. Bentley founded at school was one-third Jewish. That's far beyond the proportion of Jews in British society at large."

"You think it was unfair?"

"Nowadays, many might consider it prejudicial against gentiles."

"He spoke against Jewish capitalists and socialists."

"He spoke against all capitalists and socialists. He was a Distributist, remember."

"He made fun of the Jews in poetry and prose."

"He made fun of everyone in poetry and prose, none more amusingly than himself. Those he made fun of he took seriously."

"He also took religion seriously," I said. "When he felt compelled to make an adult choice, he did not choose the Jews."


"True," he said, "but he chose the Jewish Messiah, who revealed that through Him salvation is from the Jews. How could he be anything but enthusiastically pro-Semitic?"

"Enthusiastically?"

"Enthusiastically and unrepentantly."

He stood up, indicating that the interview was over.

"It was pretty easy," he said, "for Chesterton's supporters, Jews included, to clear him of charges of anti-Semitism."

It won't be so easy, I thought as I left to write my story, to clear him of charges of pro-Semitism. 

## FROM THE WIENER LIBRARY...

There is no one voice that speaks on behalf of the Jews. However, we come very close with this official statement from the Wiener Library Institute of Contemporary History in London, which contains the archives of anti-Semitism and Holocaust history:

The difference between social and philosophical anti-Semitism is something which is not fully understood. John Buchan, for example, was charming towards Jewish people he met, but undoubtedly possessed a world view of anti-Semitism. With Chesterton we've never thought of a man who was seriously anti-Semitic on either count. He was a man who played along, and for that he must pay a price; he has, and has the public reputation of anti-Semitism. He was not an enemy, and when the real testing time came along he showed what side he was on.



# Distributism and the Jews

by Dale Ahlquist

One of the reasons G.K. Chesterton is dismissed as an anti-Semite (which he was not) is due to the fact he is also dismissed as a Distributist (which he was). He attacks both capitalism and socialism, but because he mentions (however seldom) that Jews figure prominently in both these systems, his critics take it to mean that he is actually attacking Jews, rather than capitalism and socialism. “But why does he bring up the Jews?” they ask. “Isn’t this the proof that he is anti-Semitic? He is blaming the Jews for opposite things! His obsessive dislike of the Jews has clouded his reasoning. Distributism is only a mask for anti-Semitism!”

Okay. First, Chesterton does not blame Jews for capitalism and communism. Second, he argues that they are not opposite things. Both capitalism and socialism are the enemies of the wide distribution of property. Thirdly, when he points out that Jews played a prominent role in both capitalism and socialism, he is not making things up. The international banking houses controlled by such Jewish families as the Rothschilds, the d’Erlangers, and the Warburgs had inordinate power and influence over national and local commerce and government. Ironically, the radical reaction against the great wealth and great poverty created by unbridled capitalism was communism, which was first put forth by a Jew and was promulgated by the Jewish café intellectuals. This is not to say that all wealthy capitalists and all revolutionary communists were Jewish, but their leadership and disproportionate representation in each group was undeniable. To mention it does not make one an anti-Semite.

But it makes sense to Chesterton why Distributism has had little appeal to the Jews. It is an ideal based on property, on the home and the land. It is follows that the feelings of love and

protection of home go along with the natural attachment to the homeland. It is logical therefore that the Jews, who were without their own homeland, would gravitate toward social and economic systems that are not dependent on the idea of home and homeland, systems as seemingly opposite as capitalism and communism, that actually are quite the same. As Chesterton explains in a *New Witness* article in 1921:

There is no contradiction here, but absolute consistency. Capitalism and collectivism are not contrary things... they are two forms of the same thing... men dependent on great centralized systems, doling out to them their food and work... In short, Big Business and Bolshevism are only rivals... making efforts to do the same thing... I am not surprised that the cleverest men doing it in both cases are Jews. And this is not in the least because I dislike Jews; for everybody who knows me knows that I do not. It is because I know the Jews to be cut off from one particular ideal; which is the only possible alternative ideal to their collectivist capitalism and their capitalist collectivism.

Though Chesterton portrays socialists as a futile lot, he is especially critical of capitalists who simply make money from money—moneylenders, money traders, money launderers—who add nothing of substance to an economy in terms of honest labor and an honest product.

After enjoying a period of unprecedented popularity, usury is starting to get a bad reputation again. For several centuries there was in almost every town in Christendom one figure whose trade was forbidden by the Church, but who could ply that trade because he was not a member of the Church. He dealt in the most addictive drug known to man: money. Many peasants went deeply in debt to these usurers,

who gained enormous wealth in the process. After Christendom started to backpedal on the matter of usury (when it was discovered there was money in it), a thing called banking became institutionalized. Chesterton, however, did not backpedal; his opinion of usury did not undergo reform: “I could do a great many things before I came to definitely anti-social action like robbing a bank or (worse still) working in a bank.” But we, of course, now consider usury something normal. That is because most of us are in debt up to our eyeballs. We’re not in debt to a Jewish usurer in the village, but to some faceless megabank (that recently merged with another megabank and will soon be taken over by the government). It holds our mortgage, our car loan, our credit card, and our first-born child (in the form of college tuition). Since we’ve sold out to capitalism, the usury part of Chesterton’s argument holds only the vaguest meaning for us because we’re on the wrong side of it, the inside. And we’re locked in.

Chesterton’s point is that usurers were disliked because they were usurers, not because they were Jews. Have you ever had unkind thoughts about your banker? Do you care what religion he is?

We should add that there was one community of twentieth-century Jews who lived a very Distributist lifestyle: the pioneers who began the re-settlement of the Jews in the Holy Land. Chesterton personally visited them and was greatly impressed. It certainly reinforced all of his ideas, including his support for Zionism. But he feared that it would not last, that Jews would revert to their capitalist and socialist tendencies if they settled in greater numbers. And that’s what happened. But this was not peculiar to the Jews. It is also what happened throughout Europe and the West during the same period, a time marked by the end of family farms and many small businesses, the growth of huge multi-national corporations, the growth of government bureaucracy, great wealth, great poverty, bloody wars and unimaginable oppression to people of all races and religions. ☞

# More Vindication from Chesterton's "Last" Book

As I Was Saying

This is the last book by G.K. Chesterton that was published during his lifetime. However, his literary estate would publish fourteen more books by him after his death, and there are still new books by Chesterton appearing almost every year. He apparently hasn't stopped writing. He certainly hasn't stopped being relevant.

The title indicates that Chesterton is continuing a conversation he has been having with us all along. The amusing observations of our world, the striking insights, the prophetic pronouncements are all here ("In America, wheels have completely taken the place of legs"), but upon revisiting this volume I found something else, something that I wasn't looking for, but that I happened to notice because it was on my mind. I found more solid proof that Chesterton was not anti-Semitic.

If there is a connecting theme in these essays taken from the *Illustrated London News*, it is the problem of the modern world, whose philosophy is characterized, says Chesterton, by two main modern ideas: "first, that it is often extremely convenient to do what is wrong; and second, that whenever it is convenient to do what is wrong, it immediately becomes what is right."

In art anything is allowed, but there is no moral base for condemning it because we are no longer a Christian society. If we are Christians we should just admit this, and then "launch a crusade to convert or conquer the modern world." Instead, we have formed a "one-sided truce" with the modern world, which is to the enormous disadvantage of Christians. We do not attack the modern world, but we allow it to continue to attack us.

Increasingly, we are seeing laws made that not only defy our beliefs, but defy common sense: "Recent

legislation has ridden roughshod over the instincts of innocent and simple and yet very sensible people."

Chesterton further points out that the void left by the loss of religion has been filled with a kind of tribalism. More about that in a minute.

Connected to the creeping secularism is a creeping skepticism. Agnosticism is the new religion. Chesterton makes reference to the same latitudinarian turnip that was still a novelty when he wrote *Heretics* thirty years before. Skepticism has attacked the foundations of Christianity, despite the fact that the doubts being raised against the Christian claims are in themselves rather doubtful, such as the new alternative theories to the miracle of the Resurrection: "The Apostles may have hidden [Jesus' body] in order to announce a sham miracle but it is very difficult to imagine men being tortured and killed for the truth of a miracle which they knew to be a sham."

While the marriage of skepticism and secularism injected doubt into religion, it injected materialism into philosophy. The hard-driving economic theories are propped up by technological innovations, and yet, as Chesterton points out, "Progress is the mother of problems." Progress doesn't seem to get us anywhere. Materialism is horribly unsatisfying. The modern world is filled with lots of things and is maddeningly empty. Chesterton has laid the groundwork for T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "The whole world of mere stunts and scoops and trading and self-advertisement is spiritually dead; although it is very noisy. It is, in the precise and literal meaning of the phrase, a howling wilderness."

Now why is this proof that Chesterton is not anti-Semitic? Because if he were, *he would blame these*

*problems and all the problems of the modern world on the Jews.* But he does not. He does not blame the Jews as the agents of secularization, the prophets of materialism, or the enemies of Christian culture. He does not blame Marx, Freud, and Rothschild. He blames Voltaire and Frederick the Great, he blames Protestants who lost their faith but kept their morality, which morphed into Puritanism, who have infected our culture not with their life, not even with their death, but with their decay.

In fact, the only time he mentions the Jews is to defend them.

He mentions the "New Myth" in Germany that the complete surrender of all the German armies in the World War I "was somehow or other brought about by the Jews." Despite the "real problem of the international position of the Jews," it is ridiculous to think the Jews could be responsible for the defeat of Germany. No one listened.

He also notes that there are new reports that Jews are being persecuted in Europe and Russia and, though it probably makes no difference to the people being persecuted, it is being called "the persecution of a race and not the persecution of a religion." Ironically, it is not the old political systems that are persecuting the Jews, but the new political systems. "Doubtless those political systems deal even more in political persecution than in religious persecution. But that does not make them less persecuting, but more. The whole point of the last political theory is that sectional parties and programs must be forcibly effaced, that the opposition press must be abolished, and only one party allowed...It is a much more profound problem than Progressives have ever found out. But it does measure the exact sense and degree in which humanity does change, that it should disappear in the nineteenth century to reappear in the twentieth." No one listened.

And now, as the "Progressives" continue to ignore the failure of their political experiments in the twentieth century and march further into a "howling wasteland" in the twenty-first century, we can expect more persecutions, and not just of the Jews. ☸



# Whatever You Do, Don't Mention the Jews

## *The Jewish Revolutionary Spirit and Its Impact on World History*

by E. Michael Jones  
South Bend, Ind.: Fidelity Press, 2008  
1,200 pages, \$48

Reviewed by Bradley Rothstein

In the spring of 2008, a series of lectures on Catholic social teaching was scheduled at the Catholic University of America: ten different lectures by ten different lecturers. On the day of the first lecture, a representative from the Southern Poverty Law Center called the university and said that two of the scheduled lecturers were anti-Semitic. Without any investigation whatsoever, the university immediately cancelled the entire lecture series. One of the accused anti-Semites was E. Michael Jones, editor of *Culture Wars* and author of several books.

It was not the first time that Jones has been disinvited as a speaker after a phone call was made. This began happening after he started writing about the Jews. Jones had not provoked the same reactions when he wrote other provocative books such as the one claiming that the Medjugorje phenomenon is a fraud, or that urban planning and freeways have destroyed stable ethnic neighborhoods, or that almost all horror movies are really about abortion. His latest work, which has been brewing for the past few years in his magazine, has a thesis that really caught the attention of the people whose business it is to call up Catholic organizations and warn them about fraternizing with anti-Semites.

What is the thesis that has gotten Jones into all this hot water? He says that throughout the past two thousand

years, whenever there has been a major movement opposed to the Catholic Church, the Jews have tended to side with those movements, whether religious, social or political. Jones even invokes Cardinal Newman who noted that this "spontaneous heresy" has been the natural position of the Jews, who have consistently rejected Christ and rejected the Church.

Now the question: why should this thesis be considered anti-Semitic? The answer: I have no idea. Are Jones' critics claiming that the Jews have always agreed with the Catholic Church?

The difference between this book and say, *Constantine's Sword* by James Carroll, is that self-hating Catholics like Carroll blame all the trouble between Christians and Jews on Christians, on an unwarranted, unexplainable Christian hatred of the Jews, whereas Jones makes a case that the Church has had to defend itself on more than one occasion from revolutionary movements in which the Jews played a part, small or large, and the Jews consequently faced the resentment of Christians afterwards. For instance, Catholics were a little put out when they first discovered what the Talmud said about Jesus and Mary. Jewish excuses for these ugly passages have always been unsatisfying.

Jones' account of the Spanish Inquisition will provide some myth-smashing material, and the accounts of Johannes Reuchlin and Josef Pepperkorn, the Anabaptist revolt, and Rabbi Menessah ben Israel (who some Jews thought was the Messiah) will be completely new for most readers. But the really hot stuff is his discussion of the neo-conservatives. Eyebrows will go up. However, here and throughout the book, his research and analysis is comprehensive and calm. The veins never

bulge from Jones' neck; if there is Jew hatred here, it is immensely cunning.

I would hope that Jones' critics would give him a fair reading rather than continuing to arrange to have his public appearances cancelled. They're not helping their own case—whatever that case is. It's really hopeless when anyone who tries to discuss the Jews is instantly accused of being anti-Semitic if his conclusions point out any Jewish misbehavior. Of course, that was G.K. Chesterton's fate. In fact, what some might consider the most astounding achievement in Jones' monumental book is that he manages to avoid quoting Chesterton in 1,200 pages of writing about the Jews. He does bring up Hilaire Belloc early on, however, and what he says sums up the whole problem around trying to have this discussion:

Hilaire Belloc...wrote that if anyone "exposed a financial swindler who happened to be a Jew, he was an anti-Semite. If he exposed a group of Parliamentarians taking money from the Jews, he was anti-Semite. If he did no more than call a Jew a Jew, he was an anti-Semite." Things have gotten worse since Belloc's time. Now it is impossible to write about Jews without opening oneself to the charge of anti-Semitism, as Belloc's current place in the literary firmament now shows. It is impossible to refer to Belloc in polite circles without the mandatory disclaimer that he was an anti-Semite, partly because he wrote one book about the Jews. His views on Islam are much more censorious than his views on Jews, but that fact never gets mentioned. Nor is it obligatory to refer to Belloc as an anti-Muslim.

One of the problems, I suppose, is that the Catholics have a Pope and the Jews do not. There is not a single Jewish spokesman who can stand up and represent the Jews, whether defending them or taking the blame for them. There isn't an official Jewish position on anything. Anyone attempting "dialogue" with the Jews encounters a thousand different voices, some condemning, some conciliatory. But however the generalizations fail, the Jews remain a distinct people. "Stiff-necked," says God—who has also been accused of treating the Jews badly. ☸



# The Desire of the Everlasting Hills

## ***The Battleground: Syria and Palestine, the Seedplot of Religion***

by Hilaire Belloc

San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008

(originally published in 1936 by J.B. Lippencott Company, Philadelphia)

330 pages, \$17.95 (softcover)

Reviewed by Sean P. Dailey

**T**wo of the greatest gifts that the English Catholic literary revival gave to twentieth century literature are Hilaire Belloc's *The Four Men* and *The Path to Rome*. Ignatius Press has just published a new edition of a 1936 work by Belloc that deserves to be ranked with those.

Belloc's *The Battleground: Syria and Palestine, the Seedplot of Religion* is a history that, like G.K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*, places the Incarnation as the focal point of history, the one event that all world events before it anticipate, and all world events following it look back to. Belloc makes that point every bit as forcefully as Chesterton does, and even more eloquently, I would argue. *The Battleground* contains some of his most poignant, heartfelt writing.

While Chesterton painted with a rather broad stroke, incorporating the entire classical world, Belloc turns his gaze exclusively on Syria—Syria as that region was classically known, the 400-mile narrow belt of land that stretches from nearly Asia Minor in the north to nearly the Sinai Peninsula in the south, with Palestine only one small part of the whole. It is an area dominated geographically, Belloc emphasizes in the very first chapter, by two long mountain ranges that run nearly parallel the entire length of the region, with the western range overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and the eastern range overlooking the trackless desert. Between them is a narrow valley that, historically (meaning, before the Turks came and laid everything to waste) was lush and fertile, at least as far south as the Dead Sea.

"Syria has been of the highest moment to our race, above all this, it has been our Battleground," Belloc writes.

It has been the place of meeting and of shock between opposing cultures of men, of conflict between those forces which sweep and mould the world beyond all others, which are supreme above all others, those sources from which all cultures flow—religions.

If you think you fully appreciate the various conflicts going on now in what we today call the Middle East, think again. This book will show you that there is much, much more to the story than the platitudes of politicians and the neglectful "coverage" of most major media. The history books you used in school probably called this region and Mesopotamia to the east, the "cradle of civilization." But that too is inadequate, because history books are written by people who generally do not take religion into account. Belloc knows better, writing:

Here the gods of Egypt appeared, not without majesty, but distaining to plant their worship; here in the Syrian belt the very evil gods of Lust and Torture were to await the proclamation of Israel and to be locked in battle with the God of Israel—the One Jehovah—and to succumb; Moloch and Ashtaroth and Baal. Here the Spirits of loveliness were to waft in from the West in the wake of the Greek armies, and here Aphrodite mourned for Adonis dead. Here in the fullness of time came the flower of our Revelation, the kindling of the Gospel, the founding of the Church, the violent, obscure, creative tragedy whence our Western civilization arose.

Belloc spends the first half of the book examining the various civilizations that overran Syria in the centuries leading up to Christ: the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Through it all he repeatedly returns to a tiny island of people toward the south of Syria, the "Bene Israel" (the

Children of Israel), who alone of all peoples not only worshipped only one God, but who insisted that this one God "was also the creator of all things; he, personal as any City-god, was also universal and alone."

Belloc makes clear throughout is that everything that happened to and in Syria, did so because of divine design, because this Divine Unity of the Bene Israel willed it, to bring about his ultimate purpose: the redemption of man.

Some thirty years or a little less after the peace of Augustus began there was born to an obscure young woman from Galilee...a man-child. The purpose of Syria was accomplished. The Desire of the everlasting hills had come.

At this point, probably because he could think of no other way to convey his awe at of just what this "Desire of the everlasting hills" meant, Belloc does an extraordinary thing. He switches from history to historical fiction to let the reader view Christ through the eyes of a young Rabbi, Yakoub. And Yakoub's first encounter with Christ happens to be Christ's sermon in the synagogue at Capharnaum, the one recounted in John 6. As he strains to catch a glimpse of Jesus in the throng, Jesus sees him too.

Those eyes were upon him. He had heard of their compelling beauty; of their compassion; of their authority. But hearing is all words, and words are shadows. This was the living thing, and there came upon him in that moment the stroke whereby men are slain or live...Something eternal had struck and shaken the central nerve of his being.

Belloc is surely in heaven, for that paragraph alone if for nothing else. His description of the Crusaders' first sight of Jerusalem is achingly beautiful. Belloc is a sublime writer and the description (or is it a dismissal?) one often hears of him as a grumpier version of Chesterton is exceedingly unfair—and Chesterton would be the first to tell you so. *The Battleground* is a joy, Belloc at his finest, and indispensable if you want to understand how misguided Western policy toward the Middle East truly is. ☚

# Good Pope, Bad Press

## ***The Myth of Hitler's Pope: How Pope Pius XII Rescued Jews from the Nazis***

by Rabbi David G. Dalin  
Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2005  
209 pages, \$27.95 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Chris Chan

Rabbi David G. Dalin's book *The Myth of Hitler's Pope* is far from the first to clear the name of Pope Pius XII, but it is an admirable defense and a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on the subject. The charges leveled against Pius XII are widely known: during the Second World War, the Pope was allegedly responsible for the deportations and eventual deaths of thousands of Jews. In this allegation, at best Pius XII remained aloof and silent as the Holocaust steamrolled through Europe; at worst, the Pope was an active Nazi collaborator, enthusiastically purging Jews from central Italy. This portrait of Pius XII is of a cold and cruel pope, driven by a sociopath's sadism and a centuries-old tradition of anti-Semitism.

This is the prevailing view of the pontiff's legacy today, and the image appears in numerous forms. It is no coincidence that in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the Minister of Magic who is cursed into collaborating with the Death Eaters bears the Christian name Pius. John Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope* (1999) captured the popular imagination; using a slew of secondary sources, his book condemned Pius XII for complicity in the Holocaust. Cornwell became a media darling, and countless people who never read his book still took the title (which summed up Cornwell's thesis in two words) to heart.

The chief flaw in this papal portrait is that it is patently false. As Dalin amply illustrates, far from being an enthusiastic Nazi supporter, the Pope was one of Hitler's staunchest enemies. Pius XII actually saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews and led an effort to protect the Jewish population. Nuns sheltered Jews in their convents, the Vatican funded food drives to help

the Jews, and Pius XII even turned his summer residence into a sanctuary for Jewish refugees. These works were not hampered by the Pope's position as a statesman that required him to maintain a certain level of civility with enemy authorities. Papal denunciations tended to exacerbate already difficult situations, so he was forced to temper his public criticisms in order to avoid potentially disastrous repercussions from Hitler's or Mussolini's armies. During the hostilities, Pius XII developed a firm friendship with Israel Zolli, the Chief Rabbi of Rome. Zolli gained such a powerful respect for Pius XII that he eventually converted to Catholicism.

One might think that the Pope's actions would have earned him a reputation as one of the great heroes of World War II, but, unfortunately, the opposite has proven to be the case. Other European leaders were shamed by the Pope's defense of the Jews, and it appears they minimized his contributions in order to distract from their own inaction. Pius XII did little to promote his own good works, but prominent Jews ranging from Albert Einstein to Golda Meier praised the Pope for his accomplishments. It was not until the left-wing playwright Rolf Hochhuth, backed by Communist officials desperate to discredit the Catholic Church, released the play *The Deputy* in 1964 that the world's perception of Pius XII changed. While Hochhuth's work is in fact an utter inversion of reality, the image of Pius XII as a Jew-loathing bureaucrat with liquid nitrogen in his veins lodged itself into the public mindset and refused to be shaken, like some monstrously gigantic kidney stone. *The Deputy* won a Tony Award for Best Producer when it came to Broadway, and Hochhuth swiftly gained numerous fans. The fictional play trumped the historical record, despite the fact that evidence proves the opposite conclusions.

Books clearing Pius XII are often dismissed out of hand as the scribblings of overzealous Catholics desperate to whitewash their religion's guilty past, so it is fortunate that the

good rabbi has taken it upon himself to defend the honor of the man who did more to thwart the Holocaust than any other world leader. *The Myth of Hitler's Pope* opens with a history of how the slanders started, and moves on to describe the papacy's long tradition of defending Jews (although the teachings of the popes were often ignored by the broader culture—some things never change). Pius XII's career and legacy are next evaluated, the recalcitrance of the liberal media to accept his exoneration follows, the enduring effects of Muslim anti-Semitism are treated in turn, and the book concludes with Pope John Paul II's work at improving Christian/Jewish relations.

One question Dalin never answers is what it will take to smother the anti-Pius XII slanders for once and for all. Although Cornwell renounced his own work when dedicated scholars had disproved all of the central claims of *Hitler's Pope*, mainstream intellectual currents have thoroughly ignored the truth. Dalin suggests that individuals who wish to advance an antireligious agenda, as well as Catholics who want to reshape the Church into something radically altered from its current state, perpetuate the false image of the frosty, bigoted Pope in order to score political points. The mass media has shown no interest in setting the record straight, and Pius XII's defenders are often tarred with the charges of anti-Semitism themselves.

The miscomprehensions started with a play; perhaps another play is the answer to rehabilitating Pius XII's image. I have an idea for a trilogy of plays revolving around Pius XII's life and legacy. The first play would be a refutation of *The Deputy*, depicting Pius XII's true actions and character during the Holocaust. The second play would be based on the production of *The Deputy* as fueled by the KGB's propaganda wing. The final piece of the trilogy would revolve around a group of present-day scholars, and how a university might try to suppress pro-Pius XII scholarship in the name of political correctness. It could work, but given the tendency to believe the worst of other people in order to cushion one's own prejudices, I'm pessimistic about the effectiveness of such a project. ☹

OFF THE SHELF WITH MIKE FOSTER

# The Merchant of Venice

by William Shakespeare



**Y**ou never forget your first kiss. Or your first Shakespeare. For me, it was freshman year at Spalding Institute in downtown Peoria, Illinois, 1960. As yet quite unknissed, I was assigned the role of Jessica by Br. Donald Houde, the first—and, *Deo gratias*, not the last—great English teacher to enrich my literary life.

As if a guy who was four-foot-eleven and seventy pounds in the same class with Lebanese blokes who were already shaving twice a day weren't trial enough, I had to read the lines of Shylock's apostate daughter. Give me a break! I would've been a great Portia!

The lucky lads who got to play the Prince of Morocco ("O hell! What have we here?") and Launcelot Gobbo and especially Shylock got all the juiciest lines, like this wonderful rant against that caterwauling cat-tailed scourge of music, the bagpipe:

*Shylock:* "Some men there are love  
not a gaping pig;  
Some, that are mad if they behold  
a cat;  
And others, when the bagpipe sings  
i' the nose,  
Cannot contain their urine."

Re-reading this play, I was amazed how many passages came back intact in my sixty-one-year-old memory. Prominently unforgettable are the play's two great speeches. The first is Shylock's timeless, poignant appeal to tolerance:

"I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?  
Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?  
Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that."

Portia's paeon to charity, addressed to Shylock and the unfortunate Antonio, who is about to lose a pound of flesh, his heart, to the money-lender's well-whetted knife, is no less moving than it was when first I heard it. Dressed as a judge, Portia beseeches the bloodthirsty usurer to spare his bankrupt victim:

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd  
It droppeth as a gentle rain from  
heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice  
bless'd;  
It blesseth him that gives and him  
that takes:  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it  
becomes  
The throned monarch better than his  
crown."

Of course, the cruel irony is that after all this bantering brouhaha about mercy, is that although Antonio's life is saved through a literal and legalistic interpretation of the "pound of flesh," Shylock is mandated to leave half of his estate to Jessica and her Lorenzo upon his death. And the deepest cut of all is not to Shylock's flesh but his faith: he must "presently become a Christian."

Shakespeare has been judged anti-Semitic, most especially because of this play. Those charges have dubious merit, perhaps due to the harshness of the word "Jew" to modern ears. Lending credence to the charge have been the productions that have exaggerated the caricature Jew, with stage directions calling for him to crudely cast aside the cross Antonio wears around his neck to get to the beating heart under that merchant of Venice's bosom.

But in the final verdict, Shakespeare is not guilty of sins against the Jews. What I recall about this play, from my first reading as a callow schoolboy to more recent presentations at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, is feeling great sympathy for the poor old

money-lender. We bleed with Shylock over the loss of his daughter, his ducats, and most sadly, his faith. We need not share that faith to find Portia's judgment crueler than any Christian ever ought to be.

That is why this play deserves to be plucked off the shelf and read again. 📖

## G.K. CHESTERTON ON SHYLOCK:

Shakespeare *enjoyed* the old stories. He enjoyed them as tales are intended to be enjoyed. He liked reading them, as a man of imagination and intelligence to-day likes reading a good adventure story, or still more a good detective story. This is the one possibility that the Shakespearean critics never seem to entertain. Probably they are not simple enough, and therefore not imaginative enough, to know what that enjoyment is. They cannot read an adventure story, or indeed any story. For instance, nearly all the critics apologise, in a prim and priggish manner, for the tale on which turns the Trial Scene in "The Merchant of Venice." They explain that poor Shakespeare had taken a barbarous old story, and had to make the best of it. As a matter of fact, he had taken an uncommonly good story; one of the best that he could possibly have had to make the best of. It is a clear, pointed, and practical parable against usury; and if a large number of modern people do not appreciate it, it is because a large number of modern people are taught to appreciate and even admire usury. The idea of a man forfeiting part of his body (it might have been an arm or leg) is a highly philosophical satire on unlimited recovery of ruinous debts. The idea is embodied in all those truly Christian laws about wainage and livelihood which were the glory of the Middle Ages. The story is excellent simply as an anecdote working up to a climax and ending in an unexpected retort. And the end is a truth and not merely a trick. You do prove the falsity of pedantic logic by a *reductio ad absurdum*.

(*Illustrated London News*, October 18, 1919)





# Mercy, Justice, and Redemption

by Art Livingston

## *The Merchant of Venice* (2004)

Written and directed by Michael Radford  
(based on the play by William Shakespeare)  
Rated R (for some nudity)

Director Michael Radford's 2005 film of *The Merchant of Venice* opens with a title card self-evidently a blatant lie: "Intolerance of the Jews was a fact of life in sixteenth century life, even in Venice..." In truth, were they persecuted not a single Jew would have been left in Venice. That Jews lived in Venice and prospered is tolerance by definition. Each action and title card running through the first six minutes of the film presents variations on the theme of anti-Christian diatribe. I would not be at all surprised had anyone with a fair understanding of history walked out feeling the need to cleanse himself first before going on with life.

To provide a yardstick, pre-Christian Romans and post-Christian Nazis did not share Christian toleration. Propaganda, not to mention historical absurdity, reaches its pinnacle in the opening sequence when a Franciscan religious incites an anti-Jewish riot. To add to the confusion, the actor portraying this religious actually uses the words of Martin Luther, that notorious Papist. Let us be kind and say that the understanding of certain ideas is not this movie's long suit, and only with a truly dumb final shot do the producers rear their ugly heads again.

Thank God, Director Radford stops pontificating and settles down into letting Shakespeare tell his own story; and the very first word and action on-screen from the action instantly refutes all previous harangues and vitiates any charge of anti-Semitism in either the play or the Bard—and that word is "Jessica." She is not a minor character. The beloved of Lorenzo, he speaks her name as an

act of love. Every Christian character treats her with love; no one holds her race, tribe, past, nor culture against her. No one wishes her ill because she is who she is. No one gloats because she left her people. Were *The Merchant of Venice* an anti-Semitic work, Shakespeare's Jessica would have been an object of disrespect and distrust, and Lorenzo would have been cast out as well.

Titular hero Antonio needs money to help his sworn brother, Bassanio, in his need. Out of this deep friendship, he applies for a loan that he fully expects to repay, but will not scruple to take with usury. He gets an agreed upon term from Shylock, a money-lender. In one of many fairy tale elements in the plot, Shylock will exact a pound of Antonio's flesh if he cannot repay fully in three months. Antonio agrees, although such a bargain would make a man like him sullied. After humiliating Antonio in this rather horrifying scene, Shylock delivers the famous "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech. The answer to his rhetorical question will finally come at the climax of the tale: "Yes, you are human, thus making you worthy of redemption." Shylock's concept of just revenge would be morally repellent even if he were pope. That any city would tolerate such a man reveals great forbearance; when he speaks most freely, his hatred pours forth most openly.

It happens that Antonio cannot repay the loan, and Shylock looks forward almost joyfully to his agreed upon bond to murder Antonio. Fortunately, the reason for securing the loan has ripened into a marriage contract for Bassanio, and his intended bride comes forth as a judge

disguised as a man. Various and sundry strands of the subplots weave themselves into making this young lady, Portia, into a major figure in all literature. For those of us who are old enough to remember, we might call this act of the play "Portia Faces Life." An aside: girl-dressed-as-boy ploys are probably the least effective part of Shakespeare on film; the actresses look too much like, well, women to be genuinely effective. But let us call this a convention and get on with the trial.

Shylock prosecutes his case by declaring his bond, the pound of flesh, a point of honor. He does this by comparing Antonio to a rat and a pig. Al Pacino, in a truly riveting performance, gives a depth of feeling to Shylock's sense of injury and verisimilitude to his desire to seek revenge.

As the judge, Portia pleads again and again for Shylock to be merciful to Antonio, and finally observes, "How can you ask for mercy, giving none." Shylock believes he has no need for mercy, but for justice—this is the point of the story, that he who lives by the law will be judged by the law, as St. Paul declared. "I stand by the law," proclaims Shylock. There will be no mercy without compulsion.


"The quality of mercy is not strained," is the real answer to Shylock unremitting hatred. The full allegorical thrust of what Shakespeare intended becomes almost pellucid at this point if the audience watches in the "spirit that its author writ"; Shakespeare cuts through Radford's modernist smoke-screen leaving a partially scorched odor.



The Law is inviolable, but becomes fully righteous only when touched with Mercy and Redemption. By his actions, Jeremy Irons in the performance of his life recalls the Passion of Christ; if we were to suppose to believe Shylock the most wronged party in the story, this is at the least a highly eccentric way of going about it. The resolution of the

tale both saves Antonio and epitomizes Christian mercy in the very place Shylock would have insisted on the full measure of law.

Let us leave with a thought about the character Shylock. If he initially thinks the trial has wronged him, he will have a long time to think about it, a great deal more than he would

have given Antonio. Whether or not one agrees with the outcome, this is what Shakespeare intended and Christendom believed. Discussing these matters on a level playing field would go a long way toward clearing the air of the polluting spell cast in the first six minutes of this broken-backed near masterpiece. 

## The Rosary on Celluloid

by Art Livingston

### *The Passion of the Christ* (2004)

Directed by Mel Gibson

Written by Benedict Fitzgerald  
and Mel Gibson

Rated R (for scenes of graphic violence)

Film has many potential uses, only one of which is light fiction designed for a mass audience. Such playlets are what most people anticipate when attending or renting movies, but a myriad of other uses dot the landscape of the preservation of moving graphic imagery. I would never have seen Red Grange nearly single-handedly trounce Michigan, nor have watched Nijinsky dance, nor observed the stage technique of Sarah Bernhardt, had not someone been rolling film through a camera in their direction. One possible use could be to recreate as authentically as can be, without added drama, a historical event. Apply this technique to the passion and death of our Lord, with accurate Aramaic and Latin dialogue, and the resultant artifact must be a meditation on the passion itself, a moving icon, an object of veneration.

Mel Gibson called his production company Icon Productions. If his film of Christ's passion is not iconic, all those depictions of the Nativity or the Crucifixion were merely a bunch of pretty pictures.

Visually and in its rhythms, Gibson takes us through the entire passion, devoting much screen time to the five Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary, with many of the Stations of the Cross thrown in as well. If we assume that the time span from the Agony in the

Garden to Christ's death was about fourteen hours, then the ratio of screen time to real time is about 1:7, an enormous percentage of the time for this kind of representation, which appropriately exhausts the viewer by the time we get a brief glimpse of the Resurrection, our one relief from despair. It is not surprising that the film has been misunderstood by critics who have recoiled at the violence, but they probably do not pray the Rosary or the Stations of the Cross.

Those who have called Gibson's work obsessive and needlessly violent, however, should be reminded that Gibson did not create this violence. One of the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary is the Scourging at the Pillar. There is a physical and spiritual reality being represented. Some human beings (and by extension all humanity)

gleefully took the opportunity to nearly beat to death God come to earth. We should watch it if only to be reminded of the human condition. And this is Gibson's highest purpose, to allow us to meditate on the reality of what happened that day two millennia ago.

Worse than the critics have been vituperative calumnies against Gibson and his movie perpetrated by certain groups, many of which, I truly hope, represent merely the lunatic fringe and not the mainstream of Judaism. I speak of those who behave as though they have some privileged position allowing them to dictate the religious teachings and worship of other faiths, and who, in the face of any criticism whatsoever, scream that their opponents are out to do them bodily harm, because other people on another continent a long time ago did them real injury. This supposed justification allows them to say any nastiness that happens to pop into their heads; they miss the distinction between critical commentary and



persecution. No one should suffer the latter; no one is above the former. Certainly one can understand skittishness in discussing these matters, but that is not the point. The right response to anyone who tries to put an end to an act of genuine worship is to start by asking who the hell the other thinks he is. The twentieth century produced more Christian martyrs than any other in history—where is the proffered sympathy for the dead in Mexico, and in the Gulag?

In the film, we observe the actions of the Pharisees and of the leaders of the Sanhedrin. The Scriptures do indeed indict these people, just as the Scriptures report, “Let his blood be on

us and our children!” But who does the Church hold accountable? When we recite the Creed we say, “He suffered under Pontius Pilate.” I have never heard the Italians complain about this.

Christians are accused of saying that Jews are Christ-killers. But only once in my life—once—have I ever heard someone purporting to be a Christian actually express that opinion.

Those who attack this film are not merely attacking a film, but openly attacking the Christian faith. I can only think that such people are trying to foment discord between the two religions for some reason. Instead, why not make a good film about, say, the Maccabees? I would

love to see it. When I was a child, the Jewish children in our school put on a little play on this very subject at Hanukkah—one of the few days in my twelve years of public schooling that I actually learned something I hadn’t already known. But a dialogue works two ways. Let me say that again: a dialogue works two ways. Otherwise, a speech becomes a harangue, and what gets communicated is nothing more than the speaker’s ego. We should not be surprised if in attacking another’s religion we create hostility where none existed before. Is it too much to ask humbly for a small measure of the respect that is demanded raucously by others? ☸

## CHESTERTON’S MAIL BAG

*Gilbert Keith Chesterton Answers His Mail*

# Jews and Anti-Jews

Dear Mr. Chesterton,

It’s pretty obvious that you and your whole Catholic Church are anti-Semitic. How else do you account for things like the Spanish Inquisition?

*Signed,  
Monty,*

Dear Monty,

It is the oldest of libels, the tale of our Christian fathers as cruel persecutors without reason or provocation,

and tying on to it one of the oldest and shabbiest and most faded of labels, the name of the Spanish Inquisition. As a matter of fact, the Spanish Inquisition was a very Spanish Inquisition. Its story is meaningless without the military aspect of the long and frightful war with the Moors, and their allies, the Jews. To make it merely theological is like saying that because Mr. Lloyd George is a Nonconformist, therefore the Black-and-Tan terror in

Ireland was only the tale of a Puritan persecuting Popery.

Men in the mellow mood of doubt had no way of understanding the fanaticism and the martyrdom of their fathers. They knew nothing of medieval history or of what a united Christendom had once meant to men. They were like children horrified at the sight of a battlefield. Take the determining example of the Spanish Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition was Spy Fever. It produced the sort of horrors such fever produce; to some extent even in modern wars. The Spaniards had re-conquered Spain from

Islam with a glowing endurance and defiance as great as any virtue ever shown by man; but they had the darker side of such warfare; they were always struggling to deracinate a Jewish plot which they believed to be always selling them to the enemy.

*Your friend,  
G.K. Chesterton*

*(Illustrated London News, June 9, 1923; “Anti-Religious Thought in the Eighteenth Century,” The Spice of Life)*

✱ ✱ ✱

Dear Mr. Chesterton,

Maybe the reason you deserve to be called Anti-Semitic is because you make stereotypical references to the Jews. In fact, you make stereotypical references to all sorts of people. Maybe you should just stop doing that.

*Signed,  
Against Stereotypes*

Dear Against Stereotypes,

You cannot have that sort of common sense of the countryside if it is not allowed to say that Yorkshiremen are this or Kentishmen are that, or that one course is the best way with Gypsies or another the usual habit of Jews. Most people are still allowed to express these general impressions, until they come to the case of the





Jews. There (for some reason I have never understood), the whole natural tendency has been to stop; and anybody who says anything whatever about Jews as Jews is supposed to wish to burn them at the stake.

Your friend,  
**G.K. Chesterton**  
 ("The Rural Rider," *William Cobbett*)

✱ ✱ ✱

Dear Mr. Chesterton,

Okay, you dismissed the Spanish Inquisition, but then you brought up Yorkshiremen. Let's talk about York. What about the massacre of the Jews in York, England, in 1190. That's when England was still Catholic. I suppose you have a defense for that, too?

Signed,  
**Monty again**

Dear Monty again,

Let it not be supposed that I regard the massacre of Jews as one of the glories of York. Far from it; though I do regard it as one of the disgraces of history that Anti-Semitic massacres which mediaeval priests tried to stop are always attributed to the fanaticism of mediaeval priests.

Your friend,  
**G.K. Chesterton**  
 (*Illustrated London News*, March 28, 1925)

✱ ✱ ✱

Dear Mr. Chesterton,

Let's try one more time. Maybe you didn't endorse what the Christians did to the Jews at York, but I know that you have defended unconscionable actions that have been inflicted upon the Jews. For instance, I've heard that you defend King Edward I throwing the Jews out of England. Wasn't that anti-Semitic?

Signed,  
**Monty the Third**

Dear Monty Three,

Edward I was never more truly a representative king, than in the fact that he expelled the Jews. The problem is much misunderstood and mixed with notions of a stupid spite against a gifted and historic race as such.

The Jews in the Middle Ages were

as powerful as they were unpopular. They were the capitalists of the age, the men with wealth banked ready for use. It is very tenable that in this way they were useful; it is certain that in this way they were used. It is also quite fair to say that in this way they were ill-used. The ill-usage was not indeed that suggested at random in romances, which mostly resolve on the one idea that their teeth were pulled out. It is probably doubtful.

But the real unfairness of the Jew's position was deeper and more distressing to a sensitive and highly civilized people. They might reasonably say that Christian kings and nobles, and even Christian popes and bishops, used for Christian purposes (such as the Crusades and the cathedrals) the money that could only be accumulated in such mountains by a usury they inconsistently denounced as unchristian; and then, when worse times came, gave up the Jew to the fury of the poor, whom that useful usury had ruined.

That was the real case for the Jew; and no doubt he really felt himself oppressed. Unfortunately it was the case for the Christians that they, with at least equal reason, felt him as the oppressor; and that mutual charge of tyranny is the Semitic trouble in all times. It is certain that in popular sentiment, this anti-Semitism was not excused as uncharitableness, but simply regarded as charity. Chaucer put his curse on Hebrew cruelty into the mouth of the soft-hearted prioress, who wept when she saw a mouse in a trap; and it was when Edward, breaking the rule by which rulers had hitherto fostered their bankers' wealth, flung the alien financiers out of the land, that his people probably saw him most plainly at once as a knight errant and a tender father of his people.

Your friend,  
**G.K. Chesterton**  
 ("Nationality and the French Wars," *A Short History of England*)

## THE JEWS

✱ Jews are almost the most interesting people in the world. (*Illustrated London News*, Jan. 10, 1914)

✱ I imagine most of us would agree that there is something unusual and unique about the position of the Jews. There is nothing that is quite in the same sense an international nation; an ancient culture scattered in different countries but still distinct and indestructible. ("God and Comparative Religion," *The Everlasting Man*)

✱ To this day in England, as I have reason to know, it is regarded as a rabid and insane form of religious persecution to suggest that a Jew very probably comes of a Jewish family. ("The Family and the Feud," *Irish Impressions*)

✱ Some excellent Jews suffer from a sad fallacy: they think it glorious to be a Jew, and yet they think it insulting to be called one. (*Illustrated London News*, Nov. 28, 1908)

✱ The tinker and tailor often represent the two nomadic races in Europe: the Gipsy and the Jew; but the Jew alone

has influence because he alone accepts some sort of discipline. Man, we say, has two sides, the specialist side where he must have subordination, and the social side where he must have equality. ("The Insane Necessity," *What's Wrong with the World*)

✱ The Wandering Jew is not a wandering cad. He is a highly civilized man in a highly difficult position; the world being divided, and his own nation being divided, about whether he can do anything else except wander. ("The Aristocratic 'arry," *A Miscellany of Men*)

✱ I have no doubt that the Russians have grossly oppressed the Jews. In the same way I have, in my own person, no doubt that the English have grossly oppressed the Irish. (*Illustrated London News*, April 21, 1906)

✱ A freethinker, a friend of mine, blamed Christianity for despising Jews, and then despised it himself for being Jewish. ("The Paradoxes of Christianity," *Orthodoxy*)

✱ The world owes God to the Jews. ("God and Comparative Religion," *The Everlasting Man*)

Compiled by the Gilbert Magazine News-Gathering Staff



"When the real revolution happens, It won't be mentioned in the newspapers."

## MERRY WINTER LIGHT FESTIVAL

OXFORD, England—The city council of Oxford, England (where that famous university is), has decided that there will be no Christmas this year. Instead, events in the city will be renamed "Winter Light Festival," ostensibly to make them more inclusive. The idea apparently came from the brilliant minds at the cultural development agency for the county, a charity called Oxford Inspires, which runs the celebrations. What the brilliant minds do not seem to realize, however, is that such an action outrages not only Christians but just about everybody but themselves. Not only were your average shoppers in the city upset, but so were the very people these killjoys thought they were trying not to offend. Sabir Hussain Mirza, chairman of the Muslim Council of Oxford, was quoted in the *Telegraph* as saying, "I am really upset about this. Christians, Muslims and other religions all look forward to Christmas." Similarly, Rabbi Eli Bracknell, who teaches at the Jewish Educational Centre in the city, said, "It is important to maintain a traditional British Christmas. Anything that waters down traditional culture and Christianity in the UK is not positive for the British identity."

We might recommend that they read the words of one of their native sons, a fellow named G.K. Chesterton, who says, "The great majority of people will go on observing forms that cannot be explained; they will keep Christmas Day with Christmas gifts and Christmas benedictions; they will continue to do it; and some day suddenly wake up and discover why."

## GOD IN THE DOCK...AGAIN

OMAHA, Neb.—With all the strenuous campaigning going on

prior to the elections, one might have thought Nebraska Sen. Ernie Chambers would be doing likewise. Instead, Chambers spent his energy seeking a permanent injunction against God, hoping to enjoin the Almighty from committing acts of violence such as earthquakes or tornadoes. Now what makes Chambers' suit really interesting is that he is an avowed atheist but claims, "...anyone can sue anyone else, even God." He further argued that the judge should take judicial notice of the existence of God. Okay, so let's try to figure this out. An atheist wants to sue a Being he claims doesn't exist and demands a court of law to acknowledge the existence of that same Being.

We suspect that Chambers' campaign headquarters is a place called Hanwell.

## FEELING OUR PAIN

WASHINGTON, D.C.—As the economy takes a nosedive we've been looking for bright spots, and happened to have found at least one. In 2007 the collective wealth of members of Congress grew by an estimated 13 percent, with legislators enjoying a median net worth of approximately \$746,000. Two-thirds of our senators are millionaires as compared with 1 percent of the general public. In case partisans are wondering, of the ten richest senators, seven are Democrat; Republicans hold a slight 6-to-4 edge in the House. Taking into account their \$169,000 salaries and cost of living pay increases, the 535 members of Congress have a combined total net worth of \$3.7 billion.

Readers should be able to guess just what Chesterton quote comes to mind: "It is terrible to contemplate how few politicians are hanged."

## THE ROCKING REVEREND

CROYDON, England—In case anyone has lingering doubts about the state of the Anglican Church the Right Reverend Nick Baines, Bishop of Croydon, recently published a book in which he states the Bible has become banal to the point where it cannot reach people today. Instead, Baines suggests contemporary rock songs can be more effective in expressing Christianity than the tired prose of Holy Writ. Baines believes pop song writers, because their language is so fresh, better connect with people and that the music itself can influence them to think about life's big questions.

We don't know what stations the good bishop listens to but we wonder how he managed to miss the fact many of today's lyrics are better described with terms other than "fresh." And, at the risk of belaboring the point, we don't see the likes of Madonna, Ozzy Osborne, or Britney Spears raising the level of philosophical discourse any time soon. But our poor critique is unlikely to bother Bishop Baines, whose book *Finding Faith* has the backing of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

## RIDING THE WAVE OF RELIGIOSITY

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif.—Just to show that Anglicans don't have a corner on aberrant clergy, two priests from Orange County, California recently presided over a "Blessing of the Waves." Father Christian Mordor kicked off the proceedings by thanking the Big Kahuna (elsewhere known as God) for righteous waves and killer rides for all the surfer dudes and dudettes. After the invocation someone blew a conch shell for good luck—just in case the prayer didn't take. Then Father Matthew Munoz exhorted the flock with a hearty "Let's surf!" as he headed into the waves clutching his board with the Virgin of Guadalupe inlaid on both sides.

While we have no quarrel with invoking blessings on recreation, reducing God to a mere Kahuna and then walking all over his mother's face seems just a tad on the profane side. And while some quarters of Christianity might celebrate having such "gnarly" dudes among the clergy, we

suspect the gnarlier Chesterton would wish they “were already mermen and would return no more.”

### BLAND PARENTHOOD

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.—Police responded to a late evening report of an unattended infant buckled into a car seat in an unlocked vehicle with the keys in the ignition. We should mention the car was parked in the lot of Derriere’s Gentleman’s Club. After checking the car’s license plate and learning it belonged to Geoffrey Hale, age 27, police entered the club and found him sitting at a table, smoking a cigarette, and getting a lap dance. Hale told police he had just stopped in to get a cell phone from his wife, a dancer at the club, and he didn’t want to wake the sleeping baby to bring her inside. As his wife was busy on stage, Hale figured he’d kill a little time until she could take a break. Police immediately took Hale into custody, forcing Mrs. Hale to interrupt her artistic endeavors to take custody of her child.

We are tempted to offer the following variation on Chesterton: “Let all the babies be born. Then let us drown the parents we do not like.”

### SIGN, COUNTER-SIGN

LONDON—Comedy writer Ariane Shane was offended by advertising on some London buses suggesting that people who rejected God were condemned to Hell. With the backing of the British Humanist Association and atheist demagogue Richard Dawkins, she began soliciting donations for a “reassuring” counter-advertisement: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” With donations already exceeding the target, the slogan might be hitting London buses as early as next January. Naturally, Dawkins is elated with these developments. “This campaign to put alternative slogans on London buses will make people think,” he said, “and thinking is anathema to religion.”

Right. Augustine, Aquinas, Chesterton et al. were brain dead. However Dawkins is right about the sign making people think. We think the statement “There’s *probably* no God” is one of the lamest statements of unbelief we’ve seen in some time.


### NO WAY TO UNTIE THE KNOT

SPOKANE, Wash.—Things were not going well in the Jennings marriage, and last October Sean Jennings decided on a novel way to improve the situation. As it was nearing Halloween, he lured his wife into the couple’s garage on the pretense he had constructed a haunted house there. On the further pretense he wanted it to be a surprise he blindfolded his wife and had her step up on a ladder. To add to the surprise, he then handcuffed her and slipped a noose around her neck, saying tenderly that hanging her was “better than getting a divorce.” In the ensuing struggle, Sean had a change of heart and released his wife just as she lost consciousness. Mrs. Jennings, on the other hand, had no second thoughts as she reported her husband to authorities and finalized their divorce.

Mr. Jennings will have twelve years in prison to contemplate the finer nuances of Chesterton’s statement that marriage is a duel to the death.

### THE LIMITS OF GRAFFITI SPEECH

WADEBRIDGE, Cornwall, England—The Wadebridge Town Council, along with the North Cornwall District Council, decided that local young creative artists needed a space of their own to paint their creations. So they built a wall for young graffiti artists to use to express themselves. A local resident used the wall to communicate his displeasure with the ordinance by painting the words “I paid my tax and all I got was this lousy wall.” The local constable, Sergeant Moorcroft, who advocated for the wall to begin with, has vowed to investigate the vandalism. “We have been working hard to provide something positive for the community and this coward and their (*sic*) juvenile delinquent act has set a terrible example to the youth of the town,” he said.

We’d say the graffitist understood the purpose of the wall pretty well. 



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#### The Originator

Van Eyck  
Was christened Jan, not Mike.  
This curious mistake  
Often kept him awake.  
—Edmund Clerihew Bentley

#### An Imitator

The scholars say that Homer  
Is a misnomer.  
We don’t know his name  
His lineage, or whence he came.

Socrates  
Loved to mock and tease  
His students whenever they spoke  
But they couldn’t take a joke.

Aristotle  
Didn’t write twaddle.  
“Qua motion unqualified,” is grand.  
Understand?

Kant  
Wrote cant.  
He gives great offence  
Or makes no sense.

The composer Rossini  
Took ages to say “*Al fine!*”  
A full thirteen days he  
Took to write an opera—lazy!

Bach!  
Nothing rhymes with it! Ach!  
He wrote fine music, but poets shrug  
And say, “Bach! Humbug!”

—All by Maria G. McDonald, *Derwent, Alberta, Canada*

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# The Bigot

by G.K. Chesterton

**B**igotry is an incapacity to conceive seriously the alternative to a proposition. It has nothing whatever to do with belief in the proposition itself. A man may be sure enough of something to be burned for it or to make war on the world, and yet be no inch nearer to being a bigot. He is only a bigot if he cannot understand that his dogma is a dogma, even if it is true. Persecution may be immoral, but it is not necessarily irrational; the persecutor may comprehend with his intellect the errors that he drives forth with his spear. It is not bigoted (for instance) to treat the Koran as supernatural. But it is bigoted to treat the Koran as natural; as obvious to anybody and common to everybody. It is not bigoted for a Christian to regard Chinamen as heathens. It is rather when he insists on regarding them as Christians that his bigotry begins.

One of the most fashionable forms of bigotry exhibits itself in the discovery of fantastic and trivial explanations of things that need no explanation. We are in this cloudland of prejudice (for example) when we say that a man becomes an atheist because he wants to go on the spree; or that a man becomes a Roman Catholic because the priests have trapped him; or that a man becomes a Socialist because he envies the rich. For all these random and remote explanations show that we have never seen, like a clear diagram, the real explanation: that Atheism, Catholicism, and Socialism are all quite plausible philosophies. A man does not need to be driven or trapped or bribed into them; because a man can be converted to them.


True liberality, in short, consists of being able to imagine the enemy. The free man is not he who thinks all opinions equally true or false; that is not freedom, but feeble-mindedness.

The free man is he who sees the errors as clearly as he sees the truth. The more solidly convinced a man really is, the less he will use phrases like, "No enlightened person can really hold—;" or, "I cannot understand how Mr. Jones can possibly maintain—;" followed by some very old, mild, and defensible opinion. A progressive person may hold anything he likes. I do understand quite well how Mr. Jones maintains those maniacal opinions which he does maintain. If a man sincerely believes that he has the map of the maze, it must show the wrong paths just as much as the right. He should be able to imagine the whole plan of an error: the complete logic of a fallacy. He must be able to *think* it if he does not believe it.

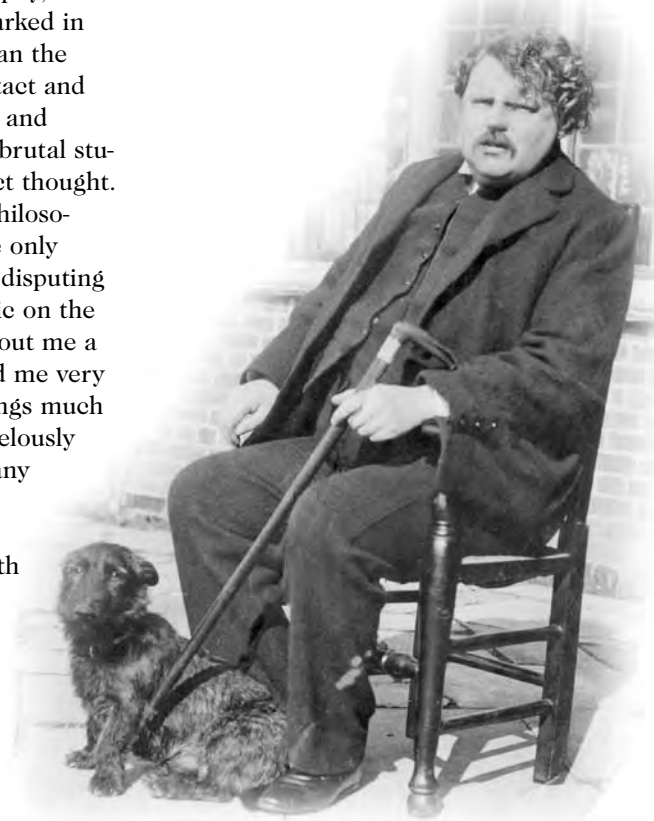
It is admitted, even in dictionaries, that an example assists a definition. I take an instance of the error of bigotry out of my own biography, so to speak. Nothing is more marked in this strange epoch of ours than the combination of an exquisite tact and a sympathy in things of taste and artistic style, with an almost brutal stupidity in the things of abstract thought. There are no great fighting philosophers to-day because we care only about tastes; and there is no disputing about tastes. A principal critic on the "New Age" made a remark about me a little while ago which amused me very much. After saying many things much too complimentary but marvelously sympathetic, and offering many criticisms which were really delicate and exact, he ended up (as far as I remember) with these astounding words:

"But I never can really feel a man to be my intellectual equal who believes in any dogma." It was like seeing a fine Alpine climber fall five hundred feet into the mud.

For this last sentence is the old, innocent, and stale thing called Bigotry; it is the failure of the mind to imagine any other mind. My unhappy critic is among the poorest of the children of men; he has only one universe. Everyone, of course, must see one cosmos as the true cosmos; but *he* cannot see any other cosmos, even as a hypothesis.

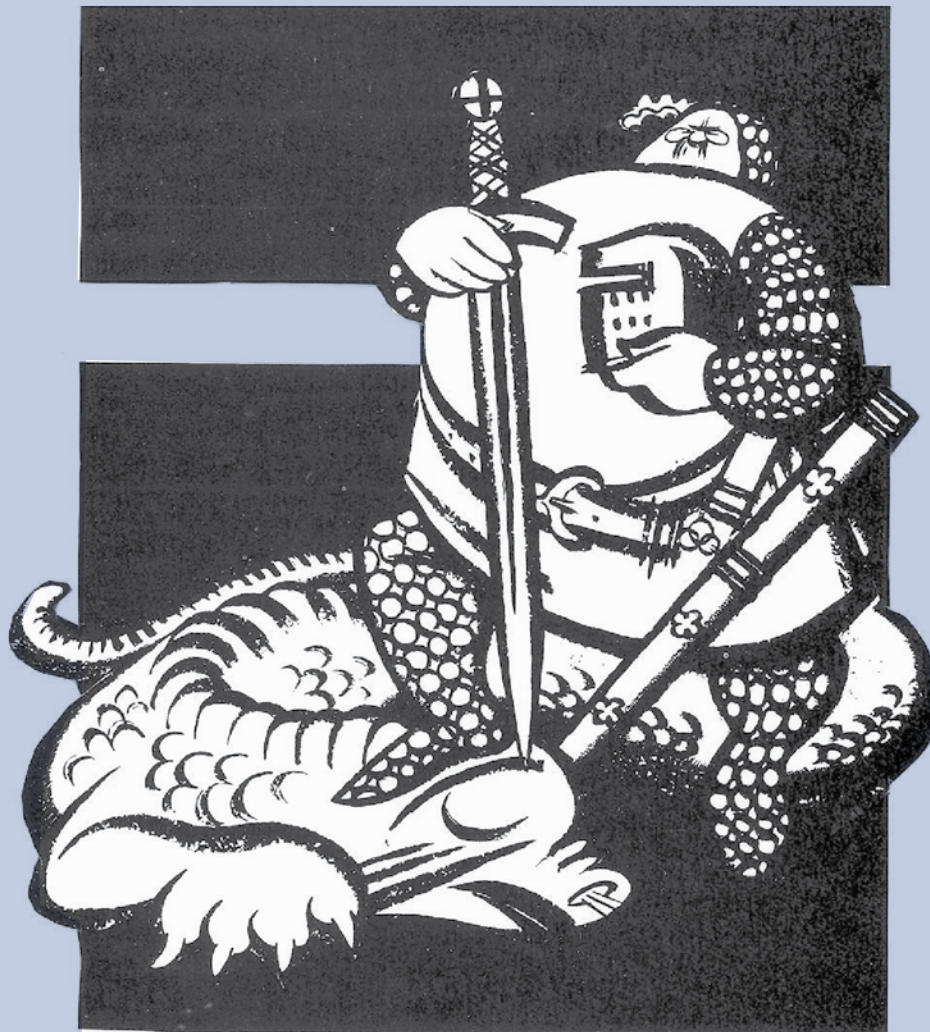
My own intelligence is less fine, but at least it is much more free. I can see six or seven universes quite plain. I can see the spiral world up which Mrs. Besant hopefully crawls; I can see the clockwork cosmos in time with which Mr. McCabe's brain ticks so accurately; I can see the nightmare world of Mr. Hardy, its Creator cruel and half-witted like a village idiot; I can see the illusive world of Mr. Yeats, a gorgeous curtain that covers only darkness; and I have no doubt that I shall be able to see my critic's philosophy also, if he should ever give himself the trouble to express it in intelligent terms. But as the expression "anyone who believes in any dogma" means to a rational mind no more or rather less than "Yip-i-addy-i-ay," I regret I can only at present include him among the great bigots of history. 

*From Lunacy and Letters*



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